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THE HALCYON ERA





*Precedence*

# THE HALCYON ERA

A RAMBLING REVERIE OF  
NOW AND THEN

By LORD ERNEST HAMILTON

WITH TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLLOTYPE BY  
A. K. MACDONALD

LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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## THE DISTANT VIEW

“ Old fogies sing in constant praise  
Of what they call the good old days ;  
But distance—between me and you—  
Lends much enchantment to the view.”

OF course all old days are “ good old days ” and ever have been since the damp winter evenings long ago when Japhet told his open-mouthed grandchildren of all the wonders that had been before the Flood. No old days can be otherwise than good old days, for they stand out as gilt-framed diaries of a time when the lame and the fat and the bald could run and jump and gallop and swim from morn till dewy eve and, in the dewy eve, quaff the red wine and the yellow and bask in the glad eyes either of lovely young unappreciated wives or of silk-tighted Gaiety syrens, according to taste, and with never a thought for the morrow and with less than a thought for the far-off days—impossibly far off in the spring-time of life—when the pitcher would be broken at the fountain and the grasshopper become a burden and all the melan-



choly rest of it. No wonder old fogies paint those days in bright colours, as they limp along the Piccadilly pavement. It was not ever thus with them. Gadzooks ! No. That same Piccadilly pavement could tell a spicy tale or two, and so could the Argyle Rooms and Sandown and Melton and Thingummy House and So-and-So Hall ; and so too—if we slip half a mile down from Piccadilly to the Savoy—could old Lady Buzby sitting over there like a 3rd Dynasty mummy and glaring through her pince-nez at Reggie and Daphne foxtrotting in the offing, as though they presented some noisome picture of modernism and as though she herself had never left her bedroom door on the latch as a token of goodwill to Bobbie Carthew. Well, well ; she could leave it gaping wide in a Trappist Monastery now and yet sleep in peace. Oh, yes ; those were the good old days all right.

When, however, a survivor of the long past takes up his pen to write of the days that have been, he will certainly miss his point if he stops at any corners to sob over the grim passage of time and the buckling up of joints, for, sob as he may, time always does pass and always has and always will, and, with its passing, joints have a way of buckling up most damnably. There is no sense, but very much the contrary, in his looking down the long vista through the glasses of

vain regret. That will get him nowhere, but it will be pretty sure to get his book into the nearest waste-paper basket. He has got to land right in the middle of the days he writes about, just as an elderly sleeper in his dreams sometimes lands in the middle of his schooldays without raising so much as an eyebrow of surprise among the little fellows by whose side he bravely limps up to School.

So here we are, let us say, right in the middle of the silly 'Sixties (as meaningless an alliteration, by the way, as the naughty 'Nineties). The room in which we find ourselves is the Morning Room of Selworth Park. Outside the windows is a formal garden, at the moment in possession of four languid gardeners, and in which none of the occupants of the Morning Room take any but a long-distance interest. An immense oblong mirror rears its unsightly bulk from the mantelpiece; the wallpaper is white, spangled with shiny gold monograms. Down the corners of the room run laths, also of shiny gold. The chairs are all chintz-covered and look very fresh and sweet. On the round table, with its plush cover, fringed with little dangling balls, are two bound volumes of the *Leisure Hour*, a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a handsomely bound volume of *Heath's Picturesque Annual*, and a circular board filled with glass *solitaire* balls—also a good deal

of needlework in moderate confusion. The beautiful marble mantelpiece is almost completely effaced by a red baize-covered board, from the edge of which dangles a fringe of twisted cords.

In the centre of this mantelboard is a gilt French clock of hideous design, shielded from heaven knows what by a large dome of glass. The clock does not go. That type of clock never does go. It is flanked by two extremely pretty cylindrical vases of Sèvres china, one of which holds paper spills and the other cedar-wood spills. These constitute the only machinery in the room for lighting candles, for there are no matches. Matches were held by the ancients to be a standing danger, not so much to the building itself or the furniture, as to the spreading skirts and petticoats of the ladies; and, as no one ever smoked—except in dungeons and other remote corners set aside for the purpose—there was really no need for matches. When we wanted to light candles for the piano or the writing-table, we took one candle to the fireplace, lighted it with a spill and carried it back, very upright, to where it belonged. If we were economical, we blew out the spill and replaced the residue in the Sèvres vase. Then we lighted the other candle from it. Safety first and no spilled wax was the order of the day. Among other characteristic features of this overcrowded

room are a number of very small chairs of extraordinary shapes, such as no human being could possibly sit on; no attempt at period decoration; beautiful pictures, beautiful china, hob-nobbing with lodging-house "what-nots" and tinted daguerreotypes; a third-rate fitted carpet, raspberry coloured but worn to a thread-bare but respectable pallor near the windows, and—dominating all—a pleasant musty smell of dry-rot and *ruban de Bruges*.

The ladies present are in crinolines—not the Titanic affairs of Georgian days, but hoops of meeker proportions—and the men are in peg-top trousers and shapeless sacklike coats. Most of them sport whiskers but some few have moustaches. Not one is clean-shaven. Their tendency is to drawl and to affect a languid indifference to everything that is strenuous or irksome in life. They are not quite convincing. The older ladies, too, only partially emancipated from Early Victorian affectation, seem hardly to ring quite true, but the younger ones are perfectly simple and natural—sweet bread-and-butter misses, brought up on *Cushions and Corners* and on Edgeworth's *Moral Tales*—not in the least amusing but very anxious to please.

The men are making a pretence of reading *The Times*, the *Morning Post* or the *Standard*. It is only a pretence because no one of normal men-

talities could possibly read the papers of that day for more than five minutes and remain awake. Their dullness was sepulchral. Looking back across the years, with the *Daily Mirror* or *Express* on our knees, it is amazing that no paper should have arisen, during all those long dreary decades, that aimed at interesting its readers. The papers, over which the poor Midvics yawned in ill-concealed boredom, dealt almost exclusively with Court news, social functions and pompous, polysyllabic political speeches. There were no big-type headlines nor any subject-matter to which the degrading term "sensational" could, by any ingenuity, be applied. Anything bordering on the sensational, either in literature or journalism, was pushed out of sight as being beneath the notice of persons of dignity and position. It was not held to be quite in tune with the starched gentility at which the period aimed. So, in order, I suppose, to advertise their concurrence with the social gentility of the period, the daily papers remained ponderously dull. They cut out all murders, divorces, burglaries, scandals about Rectors, boxing and athletics. Such low fare was served, for those who were vulgar enough to seek for it, in the columns of the *Sportsman* and the *Sporting Life* and in the still darker records of the *Police News*, but no such low publications as these, of course,

ever found their way on to the plush-covered table in the Morning Room at Selworth Park; and so the gentleman yawned and the ladies plied their needles while the hostess read aloud the names of all the great people who had been at Lady St. James's reception the night before.

Apart from its excessive gentility, which fettered its legs and handcuffed its wrists and kept perpetual blue spectacles on its nose, it was certainly a pleasant indolent life that the Midvics passed inside the high brick wall of Selworth Park, and one into which no ugly realities from outside were ever allowed to push their way—even through the columns of the daily press. The tragedies of the unsheltered were thick in those days—far thicker than now—but the noise of them rarely penetrated. It was not meant that they should penetrate. In their bird's-eye view of the social world beneath them, Victorians of the upper classes deliberately shut their eye to all the ugly facts of life. In their talk, in their books, their plays and their newspapers there were no ugly facts. They lived in a serene fool's-paradise of their own, orchestraed by nightingales and hung around with garlands of sweet-smelling flowers. Art, in the academic sense, was a stranger to them, nor had they any wish for closer acquaintance, for they found complete satisfaction in their flowers, their music, their

poetry and their tales of romantic but well-muzzled love. Over these they wept and gushed in great content. "True to life" stories—almost unknown in those days—were not even discussed in polite Society. When *Adam Bede* first came out, it was not left lying about for fear the under-housemaids might read it and fall from grace. The gesture was thoughtful and well-meant, though, as a matter of fact, most of the under-housemaids of the day could have given poor Hettie a good many yards start in the "Knowledge of Good and Evil" Stakes and yet have romped home easy winners; but the simple Victorian chatelaines knew nothing of this and so, in the kindness of their souls, locked *Adam Bede* safely away—after they had read it through.

Today under-housemaids and most other budding young things would yawn most dismally over anything so slow as *Adam Bede*. We are not shy of the ugly facts of life today. In our literature, we take passages in our stride that the Midvics would have reared over backwards at and never faced again. Nothing offends us now except when some mawkish writer descends to sentiment or to any mistaken appeal to the higher ideals. Then, indeed, do the little red-nailed hands fling the sloppy stuff aside and, to fill the gap so left, they dig up from modern fiction, modern films, and other intellectual sewers

that used to be closed but are now open, all the ugly facts of life that they can find and dance round them Mænad dances which are not pretty and in which it is quite certain that neither Queen Victoria nor any of her ladies-in-waiting would have joined. Well, *chacun à son goût*, as the poet observed, but don't forget, Daphne dear, that ugly thoughts make ugly faces.

However, blindfolded though Society might be to the ugly facts of the lower world, it, then as now, dearly loved its implied scandals and its suggestive whisperings, but they had, of course to be scandals in exalted spheres—not sordid intrigues of the Luxborough Mills and Jam Factories but real aristocratic trippings. So, when the younger members of the party had gone off to play croquet or break the clay pipe in Aunt Sally's mouth, the married ladies got to work. To tell the truth, they had all been itching for the opportunity ever since breakfast, for, for a strictly straight-laced generation, such as the Midvics unquestionably were, their wholesale and, very often, quite unjustifiable attacks on connubial constancy were really remarkable. Is it not too much to say that in Mid-Victorian days no family of beautiful daughters were ever allowed the parentage of their official father, if any more stimulating explanation could be engineered. A cast-iron prudery, enforced by



regulation, is probably driven in self-defence to some such safety valve as this to save it from blowing up in a cloud of acid steam. Pent-up waters are quick to trickle through any gap in the embankment. In the case of the Midvics, they trickled very discreetly—not to say ashamedly—through the chinks in their straight-laced code, but they trickled interminably. The attack was never direct. It was always launched obliquely and with a pious pretence of meaning nothing that was not quite decorous and nice. Listen, for example, to the conversation in the Morning Room at Selworth House the moment the young people have left the room. It is started by Lady Balsam, whose head is bent deeply over her knitting.

LADY BALSAM.—I see one of those Bollinger girls is going to marry Lord Bray.

MRS. PANGBOURNE.—Yes. What lovely girls they all are !

LADY BLEAT (*pensively*).—What a pity poor Alfred Beverley is too ill to go to the wedding ! He was always such a friend of the mother's.

MRS. PANGBOURNE.—What a good-looking man he was !

LADY BALSAM.—Yes ; and poor Lord Bollinger so very plain !

LADY BLEAT.—Yes, luckily none of the girls are the least bit like him.

That would be all. None of the ladies look up from their work while speaking and all talk in dreamy, pensive tones, but they all mean the same thing. After a decent interval of silence, another veiled attack is launched in a different direction, as follows :—

LADY DRAGON.—Have you seen either of those Greatorex twins lately ?

MRS. PANGBOURNE.—No ; are they as lovely as ever ?

LADY DRAGON.—Oh yes ; quite.

LADY BALSAM.—Really their likeness to Hugh Spindle is quite comical.

MRS. PANGBOURNE.—Yes, I believe he saw a good deal of Mrs. Greatorex before they were born. Dr. Jenner tells me that often affects the children's appearance.

At this, all the ladies sigh mournfully, as though perplexed by the strange phenomena of nature. No ghost of a smile escapes any one of them. The American story of the nigger who chased the prospective mother had not yet been invented, but, even if it had, and had been quoted by some ribald listener, it would have provoked no symptom of laughter but only a frigid pretence of missing the point. Amiable humbugs, of course, one and all, but remember, dear reader, that it was the age of amiable humbug. When scandal-loving ladies are barred

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by the rules from being ill-natured, they have no refuge except in amiable humbug. Personally, I believe that much of the implied scandal was quite unwarranted, but the suggestion of it was a great comfort to the poor Midvic ladies, hampered and bound as they were in the matter of spoken words.

## BLANCHE AND GEORGINA

IT need scarcely be said that the only targets for the slanting shots of the ladies gathered in the Morning Room were the matrons of Society. The sheltered maidens were, by common consent, immune from the tongue of scandal, nor, poor dears, was the opportunity ever theirs to start it wagging. Watchdogs were on ceaseless guard—not so much, it must be owned, with the idea of averting disaster as to enhance the market value of the guarded treasure, which market value—most unflatteringly—was supposed to rise or fall in inverse ratio to opportunity. Often the watchdogs were themselves quite frisky, but that was not supposed to matter; in fact, the curious part of the chaperone system was that any married woman, even though she might actually be younger than the treasure she was guarding, and even though her own laces might be none too straight, was accounted a sufficient shield against such illicit arrows as Cupid might shoot at debutantes taking cover in the grimy bushes of the garden or on the landings of the back staircase.

This, of course, they were not supposed to do, not, that is to say, if they wished to remain treasures. The correct procedure for the sweet young things at a dance was as follows :—After the waltz was over (they were all waltzes in the happy days gone by) the young man would march his partner out to one of the appointed places set aside for the purpose, which were always inconveniently well lighted and inconveniently public. There the two would sit, making lame attempts at conversation on certain fixed lines, till the opening chords of the next dance rang through the halls and galleries, whereupon both would rise automatically to their feet with a pretty pretence of sorrow, but, as often as not, chanting the doxology in their hearts, and the lady would be led back to her chaperone and returned with thanks, very much as a hired bicycle is returned to the shop when it has served its purpose.

If any couple danced two consecutive waltzes together, every chaperone in the room would cock her ears and wag her head and whisper excitedly to right and left, for what could such a daring procedure possibly spell, if not that stirring word *Betrothal*?

But the real dark doings—then as ever—were those that did not spell *Betrothal*, and these—as you may well suppose—took place beyond

the horizon of the poor pegged-down chaperones. Blanche or Georgina would disappear—yes, actually *disappear*!—for some three consecutive dances, while the bereaved chaperone craned her poor neck and cackled a vain S.O.S. into the unresponsive void; for all too well she knew that every extra five minutes of absence scraped a little more guilt off the surface of the treasure she was supposed to be guarding. It was in such purple episodes as these that the backstair landings played their murky part.

These, however, were London vagaries and such blots—red, black or only grey—as they may have left behind them, fell very wide of the broad green pastures where Blanche and Georgina padded about in their broad-toed, flat-heeled, elastic-sided boots during the long doldrum periods before and after the annual anabasis to London. Sometimes—docile as the Blanches and Georginas of the day were—they got so woefully bored with the company of rooks and rabbits that they went off with Robert the groom, after the manner of Aurora Floyd, but they never got far; the forces of pursuit were too strong. Blanche (let us suppose that it was Blanche this time), after recapture, would be shut up in her room for a couple of days and fed on the bread and water of repentance, while the groom—in order to get him away and avoid

scandal and a possible repetition of the experiment with Georgina—would be recommended for quite a good place with Sir George Medway, who had no daughters. The recommendation was really perfectly honest as far as it went, for Robert was really a very good groom and a beautiful rider and quite sober and honest and all that, and one could hardly say, in writing, that the only thing against him was that he had run off with the youngest daughter of the house, and, besides, as Sir George had no daughters, why say anything about it?

So, very soon, the incident would fade away into more or less legendary mists. When Blanche became engaged to the Duke, old Lady A., it is true, puckered up her brow and cocked her head and said:—

“Wasn’t there some story once about a groom?”

“Well,” she would be told, “I believe there was some story of the sort, but she was only sixteen at the time, and, after all, they only got as far as Luxborough.”

“Well, that was far enough, wasn’t it?” was Lady A.’s caustic comment. “Anyhow, it would have been in my day,” with a hoarse chuckle.

She was always so painfully practical and un-Victorian. No one, of course, shared her

practical view. Whether it was that Luxborough was credited with some peculiar temperamental atmosphere of its own, or whether it was because it was within a ten-mile radius of Selworth and therefore, theoretically, still within the range of parental searchlights, is not quite clear ; but, in any case, the fact that the fugitives had not got beyond Luxborough was accepted, as more or less whitewashing the whole affair.

Anyway; Blanche is now a Duchess, with eight sturdy children, and no one, to look at her slightly bovine features, could well imagine her careering off at cockcrow with a fascinating groom with a brown belt and curly side-whiskers ; nor is the incident one to which one refers while breakfasting at Branksome Castle—not, at least, if one is tactful and wishes to come there again.

The doldrum periods, when Blanche or Georgina got bored and ran away with grooms, was, of course, in the slack season when there were no parties at Selworth, and that was mainly in the Spring, when men are not so easily lured into the country. During the rest of the year, country-house parties were pretty well continuous and Selworth would be well stocked with eldest sons and eligible commoners, whose presence it was hoped would gradually efface the memory of Robert and his fascinating ginger



whiskers. The numbers involved in some of these old country-house parties are almost beyond the reach of modern imagination, and certainly far beyond the reach of modern incomes. Is it not on record in the game-book of Drumlanrig Castle that, on one occasion, no less than twenty-three guns went forth against the grouse and—almost more amazing still—that they all returned ! That was, of course, in late August, but, before the grouse season began, there were cricket matches, and, after the grouse, there were partridges and then pheasants, overlapped by five solid months of hunting. Hunting was always a useful ally in the matrimonial campaign. It was an almost universal pursuit. The Midvics hunted as religiously as they went to Church. Whether they liked it or not, they did it. A man who did not hunt, in one form or another, was looked at sideways. He was not quite “one of us”.

At Eaton, in the old Duke's day, one was often asked in the evening whether one would prefer to shoot or hunt on the following day. There had been no hint of either in the invitation, but those who knew the Duke's ways left nothing to chance. They arrived armed with 1,000 cartridges and with the full panoply of the chase, bulky though it was. The expected question always came, though sometimes not till quite

late after dinner and often delivered as though it were an afterthought :—" By the way, would you care to shoot or hunt tomorrow ? " Naturally, one had compared notes with other guests and knew pretty well where the meet was, on the one hand, and what coverts were to be shot, on the other, and all the rest of it. So the answer came readily enough, and if it were " hunting ", as it generally was, well, there next morning would be a horse waiting for you fully caparisoned—not a promoted hack, mind you, with a natural flair for gates and gaps, but a real go-where-you-like hunter, such as poor men dream about for months after.

So the choice was generally hunting, but, sometimes, decency forbade and one smilingly chose the other, and then one was driven out next day to the covert-side where, long before the brake had finished discharging its load, high pheasants were already streaming across the sky. There were no long, shivering waits for the guns who shot at Eaton. At the first stroke of eleven, the beaters started their advance, whether the guns were there or not. Of course a few hundred birds sailed away unshot at, but what did that matter ? There were plenty more. Two hours of rapid firing—very rapid firing sometimes—and so home to luncheon and an afternoon of liberty.

What the Duke liked best, during these afternoons, was to take a party of his guests out "for a ride", which, at Eaton (unlike Chicago), meant a short breakneck gallop across country, taking every fence as it came, with the Duke always leading. He was a beautiful horseman. If he had not had the misfortune to have been born a Duke, he would probably have been the crack steeplechase jockey of his day.

Whether these Midvic country-house parties were at Eaton or at Chatsworth or at Drumlanrig or at Wilton or at Selworth or at any of the other greater houses, there can be no doubt that there was about them a certain atmosphere of natural, non-alcoholic *joie de vivre* which their successors of today cannot even come within speaking distance of—no, not even with the frequent help of the sideboard. It was not that people had more money then, or that we were all younger then. That, of course, counted for quite a lot, but the difference lay deeper. There was a certain contented "group spirit" about those parties, which has since been blown to the four 20th-Century winds. Motor-cars, of course, did that. Not that we would wish them away. No, not even the hoariest Midvic that ever drove his phaeton down to Epsom, would go as far as that. But, none the less and all prejudice apart, there can

be no doubt that the swift advances and retreats of "road-hogs", as we used to call all motorists in our cast-iron 19th-Century bigotry, have wiped away much of the charm of country-house parties. They make coming and going too easy. They make *ex tempore* radiations during the visit too easy. The party is in a ceaseless state of metabolic flux. You come down to breakfast and find that your charming neighbour at dinner the night before has gone off in her car to some other country house 200 miles away. Somebody else—probably a complete stranger—arrives during breakfast and introduces a discordant note that does not, perhaps, even begin to blend in with the general harmony for two or three days. It is upsetting.

## THE BURLINGTON ARCADE FROM AFAR

IN the good old golden days, "when all the world was young, dear, and all the trees were green", our geese may or may not have been swans; probably they were; but, in any case, it is quite certain that our lasses were queens. It was so easy for a lass to be a queen in those days—in any case to unsuspecting and all-believing young men, who knew nothing of the Elysian mysteries and accepted everything at face value. The "swan" posture, under such circumstances, became a fairly simple matter for the dear little geese. So long as the face plumage was sufficiently smooth and satiny, the rest was a mere matter of props and stays and pulleys; but the callow worshippers, of course, knew nothing of all this, and so just looked and wondered and worshipped and, on many unsuspected occasions, narrowly escaped being hooked. The demure little maidens were full of simple arts. They would coo soft sentiment at the piano and they would guilelessly display their sketch-books,

which necessitated close inspection, so close indeed that ringlets and whiskers sometimes made perilous contact. And then you must remember that the seclusion of Mid-Victorian country houses and their surrounding parks gave the Mauds and Emilys of the day advantages which have passed for ever from their sex. Motor-cars with their smooth devastation of distance were as yet undreamt of. Comings and goings were slower and more ponderous affairs, only undertaken deliberately and after a careful study of Bradshaw (generally by proxy). The house-party, shut off from the outside world, sang and danced and flirted and shot and hunted and fished in a little self-contained Kingdom, of which the host and hostess were the undisputed King and Queen, and which, from purely physical causes, was immune from unheralded invasion from outside, for—by the grace of God—neighbouring Kingdoms were, as a rule, beyond the compass of a carriage and pair.

Within the confines of these little Kingdoms, where three parts of the year were spent in tranquil and, let us admit, rather uneventful enjoyment of nature, the sons and daughters of the house (especially the daughters) grew up kind and gentle and with beautiful manners and equally beautiful complexions. They were as simple-minded as children and as easily amused. When,

if ever, spirits flagged, men and dowagers did not disdain the sherry decanter ; but not so the maidens ; no, indeed ; God forbid ! The tea-cup was their only stimulant, and so the little dears never distressed the ears of the company with the high-pitched squawks and shrieks and cackles that lend such a zoological tone to many modern gatherings where the female element is in force. They were always smiling and placid even at the trying hour of breakfast, at which they never failed to put in an appearance, looking as fresh as paint and, in fact, a great deal fresher, for their faces were washed as clean as new sixpences. Any girl with paint on her face was held to be beyond the reach of prayers. She was not talked about or discussed. Oh, no ! That would have been ill-natured, and the Midvics were never ill-natured ; but far more eloquent than any mere spoken words would be the marked silence that would follow upon any mention of her name. A sigh from the Countess ; a few mournful wags of the Duchess's head and that was all. But it was enough. In the slightly inflamed and, to a certain extent it may be, dog-in-the-manger judgment of the matrons present, the Burlington Arcade was clearly gaping for the poor misguided child. And why the Burlington Arcade particularly ? asks the fair young maiden, as she plies the busy lip-stick. Well,







*"With muttered invocations from the Litany"*

my dear, because, in the good old Midvic days, of which we are now singing, the Burlington Arcade was not a very nice arcade ; in fact, very much the contrary. Bishops and Curates, anxious to get from Burlington Street to Piccadilly, on parochial or theological missions, would go miles round sooner than plunge into the mysterious recesses of that Arcade. Governesses would hurry their small charges past the Piccadilly entrance with averted heads and muttered invocations from the Litany. All this, Daphne dear, was years before you were born, in fact, in the middle decades of the good Queen's reign and probably for some time prior to that ; for the exact date when the Burlington Arcade first took on its peculiar character is not quite clear, but the probability is that it dated from the very commencement.

It was built early in the 19th Century to replace the high wall which the 3rd Earl of Burlington had erected to keep out the offerings of orange-peel with which passers-by had been in the habit of enriching the garden soil of the 1st Earl and the 2nd Earl. From the very outset, its nice sheltering roof must have advertised it as a desirable promenade, where ladies who liked walking up and down could do so without getting their feet or their jackets wet. At any rate, whatever may have been the exact date when it

THE BURLINGTON ARCADE FROM AFAR

was first invaded and occupied, by the time that the Midvic period was in full swing, the arcade was wholly given over to the activities of the sisterhood of syrens. No white-tied diner-out, who had the hardihood to make the passage of those strongly-guarded 200 yards, had the very remotest chance of emerging at the far end except as a prisoner.

The first real live lady who ever set foot within that tunnel of temptations was a famous and very courageous Society beauty. In a spirit of pure adventure, she launched her solitary attack and presently—being a woman—found herself staring into a shop window in which many pretty hats were on view. While thus pleasantly occupied, she became aware of a casual prowler, who sidled up and, with what the books call an evil leer, asked her which hat she admired most. Being a woman first and a duchess second, she instinctively pointed to the most expensive.

“ May I make you a present of it ? ” asked the prowler.

“ Well, that really is very kind of you,” said the lady.

“ And to whom and where may I have the pleasure of bringing it ? ” he asked, with yet another evil leer.

“ Oh, to the Duchess of X, No. 1 Little Hope Street, please.”

A BOLD, BUT NOT BAD, LADY

"Yes, exactly," said the prowler, a little puzzled. "I understand that is the address, but what is your own name, my dear?"

"Why, that is my name. I am the Duchess of X."

*"What!!!"*

The hat arrived in due course, but the donor did not, which goes to show that he was by no means an altogether abandoned prowler.

All this is a tale of long ago. Today—for reasons which philosophers may think out for themselves—the Burlington Arcade turns on the world a thoroughly cleansed and disinfected face. Dowagers take their little granddaughters there to buy teddy-bears. Bishops and curates make the entire passage without the tremor of an eyelid and would do so were the whole diocese there with cameras, for even the atmosphere of other days has passed away. The wares offered for sale are still expensive but they are now shop wares.

So now, Daphne dear, I hope I have succeeded in explaining why the matrons of the Midvic age would unanimously have consigned you to—well, I mean, why they would instinctively have thought of the Burlington Arcade when—oh well, never mind. There are no Midvic matrons now, so cheerio!

Elderly women who painted their faces were,

I think, looked upon as standing jokes rather than as serious candidates for admiration. They were thought to be good-naturedly trying to add a comic touch to the scene. To the young of the day it never for a moment occurred—or could have occurred—that the bright colour-schemes on those worn cheeks were really meant to be decorative. That would have been quite too funny. Old Lady A, who stood out from all the rest by virtue of the extraordinary proportions of her headgear, was accorded a certain special dispensation on account of her witty tongue and the frank honesty of her facial embellishments. To the very young she was more an object of terror than of mirth, with her deep bass voice, her formidable chin and her colossal *chevelure*. As one cowered beneath the canopy of her wig and the lash of her caustic tongue, imagination broke down helplessly in an attempt to picture her as a bridge so bashful as to run round the kitchen-garden in the dead of night and hide among the gooseberry bushes. Yet such, I always understood, was the experience she claimed.

It could hardly be urged, even by the most determined *laudator temporis acti*, that the sweet and smiling young ladies, who showed such a brave front at breakfast, were amusing. They were not meant to be amusing. Amusing people—as most of us know to our cost—are almost

■

## ERRATUM

Page 28, line 20.

*For* bridge *read* bride

■



always amusing at the expense of somebody else and the code of the day ruled out any such aids to conversation as being ill-natured, even for matrons, and of course a hundred times more so for the virginal buds, in whose minds no malice was supposed to find even a moment's resting-place. Let it not be supposed for a moment that the dear things were without their sense of humour. Oh, no, no. That would be giving quite a wrong impression; but, just as one individual finds food for laughter here and another there, so do different generations see funny things in different places. The Midvics found humour in things that happened rather than in things read or told to them.

I had a very Mid-Victorian brother-in-law—a man of such austere thoughts and features that, for twenty years, he had never been known even to smile, much less to laugh. The spoken jest drew from him one look of withering scorn and that was all. P. G. Wodehouse at his best merely had the effect of deepening his perennial gloom. Here was a man who might well have gone down to posterity as being totally devoid of any sense of humour. As a matter of fact any such epitaph would have been a gross calumny, the real truth being that no one, in all those many sombre years, had found out the right way in which to amuse him. My mother found out, by



accident—literally. He was staying with her at her place in Sussex and, one fine evening, they went for a walk together through the grounds. The surface was very dry after a prolonged drought and, in making the descent of a slope covered with very slippery pine-needles, my mother—who was ninety at the time—lost her footing and fell rather heavily. Instead of dutifully rushing to her rescue, my brother-in-law leaned against a tree and laughed so immoderately and for so long that every rabbit within 200 yards scuttled in terror to its burrow. My mother had an amazingly keen sense of humour, but, as she had bruised herself considerably and had much difficulty in regaining her feet, she saw nothing in the situation which was in the least funny. Being, however, of an extremely charitable disposition, she hastened to assure her son-in-law—as soon as she was able to stand up and speak—that, in the interests of conviviality, she was quite prepared to fall down and hurt herself every time he visited her if, by so doing, she could chase away his settled melancholia and move him to the same joyous peals of merriment.

The Midvic maidens—I think one can say without libelling them—had very much the same sense of humour as my brother-in-law, for while their spoken jests were few and worn thin with much repetition, they found a ceaseless and, we

must suppose, a wholly satisfying outlet for their high spirits in jokes of the practical kind. Apple-pie beds, holly leaves in pillow cases and soap-suds in place of whipped cream were simple frolics at which they roared with laughter and which kept both conspirators and their victims in constant good humour. As far as I remember, these practical jokes were invariably perpetrated by maidens on men. The converse would not have been considered quite the thing. Maidens' bowers were sanctuaries within which no man's square-toed shoes might tread without leaving behind a trace of mud ; at any rate, that was the Victorian idea. So let us turn discreetly aside from the lintels of these maidenly retreats into the long passage known as the "bachelors' wing", the austere severity and Arctic atmosphere of which was tempered to each shorn bachelor by a gigantic fire roaring up his chimney.

## THE PARADE OF GENTILITY

ACCORDING to the evidence of exhumed recollections—into which cynics will probably read a trace of sex bias—the young men did not form quite so bright a picture in the Mid-Victorian landscape as their sisters. They were young in nothing but in years. The bearing that they strained after was that of mature men of the world and this they attempted by the cultivation of whiskers and of a bored, vapid manner which sat uneasily upon them. Except as prospective husbands for the many daughters of the house, they had but little sunshine value in a country-house gathering. They took themselves too seriously. They were rather too laboriously genteel. Gentility, to be quite frank, was the unavowed aim of both sexes, old as well as young. The horrid word itself was, of course, never mentioned or even entertained in thought. Had it been associated in word, or even in thought, with the studied Midvic pose, Hell's foundations would indeed have quivered and so too would the foundations of every house from

Cumberland Place to Chester Square. Refinement the Midvics might have pleaded guilty to and probably would have done so proudly. But gentility! Heaven forbid! The imputation would have been too awful. It savoured of the suburbs and of the well-meaning but slightly ridiculous population that ate and drank and slept in those long rows of stuccoed houses far out west, beyond the limits of polite perambulation. And yet there is not the slightest doubt that the word "gentility", ugly as it may sound, was the better fit of the two.

Now, it has been observed by wise men in many ages, that gentility, when studied and hand-reared by those who claim the right to cut out the pattern of fashionable deportment, is an ornament that sits more prettily or, at any rate, less absurdly on the gentler sex than on the sterner. A man who is too genteel wants kicking and there is no doubt—all sex bias put aside—that that is exactly what many of the young Midvic exquisites did want, even and in the same manner as male crooners on the gramophone records of today want kicking—often and hard and with thick boots.

The genteel pose was, I think, beyond doubt a natural rebound from the Georgian coarseness, which had preceded it, and which had so sadly marred the manners and language of the early

century. The Georgians—even the later Georgians and the early Victorians—were very coarse indeed. They did coarse things and they said coarse things ; and there can be little doubt that the very proper aim of the good lords and ladies of the succeeding generation was to show what tremendous strides in gentility—I mean refinement—they had made since the days when their thirsty, free-spoken, patched, powdered and puffed forbears had gambled away their estates at Crockford's and kicked up indelicate heels at Almack's, besides making frequent jokes which would never have found their way into the pages of *Punch*.

The idea at the back of all this was, of course, quite nice and proper but—like most swings of the pendulum—it was sadly overdone. The ladies and even the men, in their eagerness to show how very refined they were, became perilously near being affected—a sin which at the risk of being wearisome, I am bound to repeat, is always more or less forgivable in women but less forgivable in men. In their eagerness to stress their refinement, the men became almost ladylike. They spent much of their time in writing long odes to the hands and feet of ladies they admired. Feminine hands and feet were, in fact, all that they were supposed to know anything about, so they made the most of these two rather unin-

spiring extremities and gushed over them in verses which were quite unbelievably bad but which doubtless pleased the ladies, who were not difficult to please. What did they care about scanning and rhyming so long as pretty things were said about their hands and feet? They could doubtless have done with a little wider and less parochial praise, but then Songs of Solomon and the 19th Century did not run hand in hand, and half a loaf, as we all know, is better than no bread. So they were pleased.

It is almost unnecessary to add that men who spent their time in writing stuff of this sort, were never so "ill-bred"—as they would have called it in those days—as to mix vulgar swear-words with their small talk. No, certainly not. They never really let go, as good, honest, sturdy males should do. "Confound" was the most desperate form of anathema allowed in the presence of ladies. "Hang" and "dash" were milder expressions of masculine annoyance to which irritated mankind was allowed to give free rein, but which it need scarcely be said, were never, never heard from the lips of ladies. The dreadful word "damn" was held in reserve for the less restrained atmosphere of the hunting field and the smoking-room. In these spheres it was considered a hearty, sporting expletive, but if—under the influence of one glass too many—let

loose in the dining-room it would have raised a chorus of genteel coughs, with raised eyebrows and many pained side-glances. When this dread word had to be written or printed, it was always suggested to the shuddering reader by the symbol "d—n". The equally painful word "devil" was always eviscerated in the same way when transferred to paper, so as to soften the shock to the reader. The word, in fact, was not in the catalogue of polite speech. We never, in those days, said "What the devil" or "Why the devil" but always "What the deuce" and "Why the deuce". It was prettier though what it meant nobody quite knew. In the same chaste spirit, we never spoke then of "lies", but of "fibs" or "tarradiddles" and people were never "drunk"; they were "tipsy" or "intoxicated". In fact, we were genteel, in those days, to the very tips of our fingers.

It is easier to mock than to extol. This is a basic and irrefutable truth; but it is no less true that no portrait can be drawn in true perspective unless the shading is added as well as the high lights. It is gratifying to one's softer memories to reflect that, in the case of the good Victorians—with all the shading put in—the high lights still take complete command. Charles Lever, in his many admirable novels, points a rather contemptuous finger at the starched haughtiness of

the English dames, whom he compares unfavourably with the more rollicking ladies of his native land. If we are to take his valuation as a true one, the men of England, who chanced to find themselves in the neighbouring isle, cut even sorrier figures than their sisters and their wives, being invariably outridden, out-shot, out-danced, out-sung, out-joked and out-drunk by the dashing sons of Erin. In fact, by the time the reader has finished one of Lever's or of Lover's novels he finds himself wondering how such poor, spineless creatures as Englishmen can ever have accomplished anything in the world, or how anything but a jellyfish could tolerate the society of English ladies for more than five consecutive minutes.

However, fiction is one thing and real life another. The Victorian ladies were perhaps a little ultra-genteel—or let us rather say refined—but no one who remembers them will deny them a certain effortless dignity, which sat most gracefully upon them and which Lever's heroines and their mothers would have given their ears to be able to imitate and, indeed, did try very hard to imitate but alas ! not always quite successfully.



## THE TYRANNY OF DRESS

ALL this, however, is but a straggling excursion from the maintrack into the bordering jungle. We left our country-house party enjoying their eggs and bacon and kedgerie in the big unspoilt Georgian dining-room at Selworth. Both sexes are dressed with great care, for it is one of the established truths of life that, in communities where the brain-pan is not overtaxed, the question of dress always assumes an exaggerated importance. *Haud aliter*, as we used to say at school, was it with our gallant Midvics and more noticeably with the gentlemen than with the ladies. These last, poor dears, were given little chance of showing themselves off to the best advantage, for they were pinched and flounced and flannel-petticoated to such an extent that their actual shape was always a matter of speculative uncertainty, and one into which no one was indelicate enough to probe, even in speculation. A cast-iron convention governed the number and nature of their draperies, which were legion. For croquet and archery,

which were leisurely and deliberate recreations, no departure was allowed from fixed regulation. No one was ever allowed to take anything off in Midvic days. You might put more things on and, in fact, everyone did, on the slightest provocation, put more things on but, of the dress in which you originally emerged from your bedroom, no single fragment must on any account be shed—no not even in fun.

When girls bathed, they had, of course, to discard all their superfluous petticoats and things and, in exchange, swathed themselves from head to heel in an impenetrable armour of thick sack-cloth and, so protected against any possible betrayal of shape, they bobbed up and down at the end of a short rope. Any man who approached within a hundred yards, during this unavoidable exposure, was at once struck off the list of gentlemen. No girl could swim then, nor indeed would swimming have been possible in the heavy protective armour to which they were condemned ; but, even had it been possible, any such exercise would have been sternly frowned upon by the matrons of the day, as being unlady-like and indecorous.

With such monastic restrictions keeping at bay the roving male eye, it need scarcely be said that sea-bathing had little attraction for the Florences and Evas of the day, who found

nothing but boredom in the company of the old bathing women and of all the other female rope-hangers to right and left. Sea bathing, in fact, was not an amusement in Midvic days but a rather painful road to health, prescribed by doctors as a restorative after the exhaustion of the London season.

When, after their exact ten minutes by the clock, the health-seekers emerged from their four feet of water, their ascent of the ten steps into the bathing machine was screened off from any possible observation by a huge overhanging hood, the function of which was to conceal from the very distant males any contours which might possibly suggest that the bather was a woman. No ; there were certainly no bathing thrills for the poor lasses of the 'Fifties and 'Sixties.

Men never bathed. In the first place, practically all the bathing accommodation was for women and children and, in the second place, bathing was not looked upon as a manly recreation. It was merely a hygienic practice and, as such, slightly derogatory.

Men enjoyed a little more latitude in the matter of dress than their sisters and their cousins and their aunts and, as they had nothing else to think about, they bent their entire brain power on the problem of what they were going to wear and how they could best wear it. Every young man

who counted for anything or thought he counted for anything, had attached to him—financially, if not sentimentally—a highly-paid scoundrel—if possible a foreigner, for that was considered rather more chic—known as his valet or, more familiarly, as his “man”. These over-fed, under-worked, loafing parasites looked up his trains for him, took his tickets, paid his bills, charged him double what they had paid, did any thinking of which their employer was incapable, lied, drank, swindled and did everything within their reach that they ought not to have done; but, because they were considered part of a gentleman of leisure’s ornamental outfit, their sins were forgiven them or, rather, one might say, deliberately overlooked—except when, as in the case of Courvoisier, they reached the point of murder.

To all the fixed historical periods to which we are able to look back, we can—with the friendly help of books of reference—trace certain lasting legacies of which we are proud and others over which we quickly draw any kindly veil that is handy. One of the many Midvic legacies for which we remain, and ought to remain, thankful is the tweed suit. I am unfortunately in a position to remember, not the infancy of the tweed suit, but its early youth. If—as I think we may—we take the pages of *Punch* as a more or less faithful record of the evolutions of dress, the

tweed suit era did not dawn upon fashionable society until well on in the 'Fifties. Prior to that, the evidence goes to show that fierce check trousers were worn, even by Prime Ministers and others of little less lustre, but always in conjunction with box-cloth or broad-cloth uppers. All through the 'Forties, men still shot in tall hats. The tweed-suit fashion was probably the greatest break-away from established tradition in the history of dress—greater even than the reforms of Charles Fox and the Duchess of Devonshire after the French Revolution. Before the 'Fifties, country dress was no more than a mild modification of town dress, formal and absurdly unsuited to the negotiation of "moor and fen or crag and torrent". When the tweed fashion came along, men, in their sudden relief from the forced constriction of the past, rushed headlong to the other extreme and affected clothes of ungainly bagginess. It was quickly recognised that tweeds—or at any rate, something weather-proof and serviceable—were an almost necessary corollary to the new sporting ardour which, at that time, swept over Society. With the advent of breech-loaders and pin-fire cartridges, pheasant shooting took on a new and far more ceremonial character than when the tall-hatted, green-coated Early-Victorian sportsman had pushed pheasants and partridges out of hedge-

## THE BATTUE

rows with a spaniel as accomplice. For the first time pheasants were reared in quantities and driven towards the guns instead of presenting their elusive tails to them. So arose the much vilified "battue", to a chorus of sneers from the old brigade. The sneers, however, were swept aside as, in time, are all sneers at things new and unaccustomed and the "battue", as it was then universally called, even by its adherents, became the fashionable form of sport. It was a cult as serious as the Church Catechism. Immense pains were taken by the young school to prove intimacy with the new development, both in dress and in sporting jargon. It was, in its early days, an entirely artificial pose and its meticulous observance amounted almost to an affectation. The unfortunate novice who wore the wrong sort of boots or who shouted "mark" when he should have shouted something else, was unmercifully derided as a "muff" and hardly held up his head again during the remainder of the visit.

The new sporting, floppy tweeds were worn, not only for shooting, but in a modified form for ordinary country house purposes. Lawn tennis and golf were, of course, as yet unknown as fashionable pursuits in England, and croquet, archery and "Aunt Sally" called for no special costume. Cricket, of the sociable country house type, was very popular but even this game left

no loophole for any relaxation from the fixed laws of dress. The players had to appear at breakfast in ordinary clothes. On the ground a tent was erected in which they changed into flannels. But not into any kind of flannels. Oh ! dear no. Uniform convention here was as arbitrary as it was for the Queen's levee or for a stroll in Rotten Row. Every player had to wear flannel trousers and a flannel shirt, buttoned at the neck and finished off with a small bow tie. Round the waist there had to be either a belt or a sash. A player appearing in a shirt open at the throat would have caused widespread consternation among the ladies. Many would have blushed and some, doubtless, would have swooned. As to playing without a cap—well, it simply wasn't done. It would have been considered both eccentric and dangerous to health. Anyone venturing into the open without a hat in that unsophisticated age, was supposed to be wantonly courting either sunstroke in summer or consumption in winter. At the close of the match, the players had once more to change back into ordinary dress before re-appearing in the house. This rule, of course, did not make for lavish washing but orthodoxy in dress had a far higher Victorian value than washing which, in any case, was a matter of no little difficulty in the bathless houses of the day.



*"Some, doubtless, would have swooned"*





In London, tall hats and long-tailed coats did ceaseless duty. When we rode in the Park, we put on tight blue overalls, with a broad band of braid down the seam. Wellington boots and box spurs completed the outfit and, of course, a tall hat and a tail coat. Thus accoutred, we cantered demurely down the tan, with a long rein and the stirrups under our upturned toes. Behind all the ladies and behind any man of exceptional value rode an unhappy groom, as often as not penitentially straddling a fat carriage horse. The idea, I think, was not so much for protection or even for convenience as to show that you had a groom and a livery and a horse to put them both on. Well,

“ The old order changeth, yielding place to new  
And God fulfils himself in many ways,”

and one of these ways was the sudden apparition in Rotten Row, one summer morning, of a distinguished member of Society (I believe it was Hugh Lowther) careering down the tan in breeches and boots and with his feet thrust well home in the stirrups. Never shall I forget the open-mouthed consternation among the loungers on the green seats. If the offender had sat on the Ark of the Covenant he could hardly have caused a greater to-do. The people gaped upon him with their mouths. However, by the time

they had managed to shut them again—which took about a week—a saner view began to prevail and, within a month, half London was following his example.

It remained, however, for King Edward to give the final death-blow to the old tall-hat brigade. When he appeared, first at Sandown and then in Rotten Row, in what was then known as a “Homburg” hat, the age of stiff discomfort, which had survived in London long after its death in the country, faded definitely away and emancipated manhood expanded its long-confined chest with a sigh of relief.

## MERRY ROMPS OF YORE

IT is probable that all "period" customs are rather more sharply defined in country-house life than in town entertainments of the same date. There is a good and valid reason for this. Country-house parties are in greater or less activity for a round and a half of the clock in every twenty-four hours, whereas town entertainments are just knife and fork affairs where nothing is needed but a sound set of teeth and a well-oiled tongue. It is the way in which the gaps between the meals are filled up that sets the "period" stamp upon a party.

This possibly prosy preamble is by way of leading us back by gentle gradients to the aristocratic precincts of Selworth House. Here after the men had finished blowing pheasants to pieces at short range (for they all shot abominably and were incredibly jealous) they returned, contented or otherwise according to their luck, to the more pacific attractions of the house. Afternoon tea was in very small favour in those

days, as it was supposed to interfere with the full enjoyment of the gigantic dinner, only three hours beyond, to which they all looked forward avowedly and unashamedly; but to drink some brandy and soda or sherry and seltzer was considered both sporting and correct—not, be it clearly noted, “a” brandy and soda or “a” sherry and seltzer. The “indefinite article” prefix, with its tell-tale flavour of tap-rooms and pot-house measures, had not yet broken through the defences of country-house parties, to shame the ancestral sideboard and send shudders through the family portraits. No! we called for brandy and soda or for “some” brandy and soda, but the applicant for “a” brandy and soda would unquestionably have registered his last invitation from Lord and Lady Broadacres. The “Red Lion” might offer him suitable hospitality but certainly not Selworth House. And now we hear young men, whose grandfathers were gentlemen, inviting one another, without so much as a blush, to “have a drink”! And I am not at all sure that the reply is not, as often as not, the traditional reply of the navvy:—“Well, I don’t mind if I do.”

However, you may be quite sure that no such painful fall from grace accompanied the fortification of our young sportsmen’s systems



*"Hide and seek"*



before they headed, with revived enthusiasm, in the direction of the ladies, elegantly and femininely posed over some deserving piece of work in the drawing-room. Sedentary occupation, however, for the next two hours was far from the young ladies' minds and some spirited maiden would shortly propose a game of "hide and seek". This was a pastime of immense popularity before the invasion of electric light robbed it of much of its peculiar charm. The unwritten laws of the game laid down that the "hidere" should hide in pairs, for a single hider might well have got frightened in the dim oil-lamp-lit mazes of the house; and rule Number 2—even more inviolable—was that the pair should be a "mixed pair".

The hidere were given five minutes start and then the rest of the pack started off to "seek". Of course they never found, nor were they intended to, but the mixed pack in pursuit of the quarry was very apt to straggle and get separated, so that certain pairs of hounds would get hopelessly lost in the windings and intricacies of the house and perhaps would not rejoin the main pack till the warning sound of the dressing-gong boomed through the corridors.

I remember, on one occasion, when we were living at Eastwell, near Ashford in Kent, my father (who did not take part in the game)



went to his dressing-room to change his coat and found a pair of hidlers in the very confined recesses of his wardrobe. They pretended great satisfaction at being set free from their close quarters but the maiden's colour, it was noticed, was considerably heightened, as she emerged from the confinement that they had both found so irksome. Oh ! yes ; hide and seek was certainly a popular game.

Almost equally popular was the game of " hunt the slipper ", during which the party sat in a large circle on the floor, with a sheet covering all but their heads and shoulders. A slipper was passed from hand to hand under the sheet and an explorer round the fringe had to discover where it was. In this game the circle was formed of alternate ladies and gentlemen and the game, as I say, was very popular, especially with those who were lucky enough or quick enough, to find neighbours to their taste.

A dowager of mild ferocity, but with a keen sense of humour, found the game being played in her drawing-room. Claiming the privilege of ancient acquaintance with the rules, she re-organised the circle, placing the six ladies in one half circle and the six men in the other. She then volunteered to act as " hunter " and, with unfailing regularity, found the slipper at one or other of the points where the two half-





*"Whispered reluctant 'Good nights'"*

circles met. Next evening she proposed a repetition of the game, but there was no response from her guests.

These simple little games came under the head of " romps " and were, of course, only indulged in during the winter evenings, before dinner ; and, during these romps, it was permissible for the young ladies to get flushed and even a little dishevelled, for they were shortly going to change for dinner, at which they were sure to appear as cool and tidy as nuns and looking as if nothing on earth would induce them to double up for an hour in a wardrobe with a gentleman with long whiskers or to drop that elusive slipper where poor Lord Alfred could only find it after a long and embarrassing search.

After dinner there would be dumbcrambo or charades or music and so fairly early to bed, with the men standing in a cluster under the chandelier at the foot of the grand staircase, while the maidens tripped up to their bowers, holding their long, cylindrical bedroom candles at an untidy angle, the while they whispered reluctant " Good nights " over the banisters.

The picture stirs certain memories which are locked away in an enchanted casket. The key is a key of gold, but it is a key that does not turn at the bidding of any fingers, and so the lid remains and ever will remain closed down.

Are there such caskets now-a-days and is it merely distance that lends such golden enchantment to the view? Probably it is, but what does it matter so long as the enchantment never wanes? So, with an old-fashioned and, no doubt, perfectly idiotic sigh, let us leave the land of dreams and return to more prosaic pastures.

Why, it may reasonably be asked, did the prudish Midvic mothers complacently knit their worsted shawls in the long gallery while Constance and Amy were engaged in these exhilarating romps in the by-ways of the big house? The explanation will be found in the following intercepted dialogue—always bearing in mind that Midvic mothers generally had half a dozen unmarried daughters on their hands.

*Scene. Library of big country house. Time evening.*

*Lady Dragon and Lord Partee discovered alone.*

LADY DRAGON.—I am afraid I must ask you, Lord Partee, what your intentions are with regard to my dear little Hilda.

LORD PARTEE.—Intentions, Lady Dragon? Why I haven't got any intentions. I don't know what you mean.

LADY DRAGON.—Then I am to understand that you have simply been playing fast and loose with the poor child's affections?

LORD PARTEE.—Fast and loose ! But I haven't been fast or loose. I give you my word I haven't, Lady Dragon.

LADY DRAGON.—And you can say that after secreting yourself with her in a wardrobe for the whole evening ? Don't you realise that you have compromised the poor girl irretrievably ?

LORD PARTEE.—But I didn't compromise her. I didn't really. How could I possibly in a wardrobe ?

LADY DRAGON.—Very well, Lord Partee : if that is your idea of honourable conduct, I have nothing more to say.

*(Stalks haughtily from the room. She mounts to her daughter's bedroom, where she finds her brushing her long glossy hair.)*

Well, a pretty mess you have made of things, I must say.

HILDA.—How, mamma ?

LADY DRAGON *(mocking)*.—How, mamma ! Well, sitting all night in a wardrobe with a man without getting him to propose to you.

HILDA *(to gain time)*.—It wasn't all night, mamma. It was only before dinner.

LADY DRAGON.—Well, it's the same thing or practically the same thing.

HILDA.—But what could I do, mamma ?

LADY DRAGON.—Don't be a fool. There are

a hundred things you might have done. Did he kiss you ?

HILDA.—Yes, mamma.

LADY DRAGON.—More than once ?

HILDA.—Yes, mamma.

LADY DRAGON.—And you simply sat there like an idiot and let that man kiss you for an hour ?

HILDA (*sobbing*).—Well, mamma, you know you told me to make myself agreeable to Lord Partee and, as he seemed to want to kiss me, I thought I had better let him.

LADY DRAGON.—You really are a perfect fool. And then the Duke came in and found you two in his wardrobe ?

HILDA.—Yes, mamma.

LADY DRAGON.—And you didn't scream ?

HILDA.—Scream ? No, why should I scream ?

LADY DRAGON.—Are you quite brainless ? Don't you know that, as soon as you heard footsteps, you ought to have screamed ? You ought to have cried :—" Help ! Help ! Unhand me, Sir," or something of that sort. Then he would have had to marry you.

HILDA.—But, mamma, you never told me that.

LADY DRAGON.—I should have thought common sense would have told you. How do you suppose I got your father to—— Oh ! well ; never mind ; it's no use talking to a fool.

L A N D E D

*(Enter maid with note.)*

MAID.—A note for Miss Hilda, my lady.

HILDA *(after reading it)*.—Oh ! mamma ; this is from Lord Partee asking me to marry him.

LADY DRAGON.—My darling, darling child. I can't tell you how very, very happy you have made me.

*(Kisses her rapturously.)*



## MAINLY ABOUT DUBLIN CASTLE

**A**MONG other country house frolics, that of "dressing up" enjoyed an unflagging popularity throughout Victorian times, principally, no doubt, because it legitimised the temporary use of paint and powder for the ladies. It was always interesting to note that those whose daily complexions were at all below par, always found great difficulty in washing the paint off; in fact, it was sometimes several days before they succeeded in doing so thoroughly, to the mild, but by no means silent, scorn of those who had—regretfully—soaped or vaselined themselves clean at the outset.

Servants' balls (now, for obvious reasons, extinct) were more popular with the men than with the lady members of a country-house party. But they were fixed institutions. No big country-house, that held itself in any respect, ever passed through the Christmas period without a servants' ball. They were great affairs. Keepers' families and lodge-keepers' families, gardeners and watchmen and any females be-

longing to them were all welcome or, at any rate, they all came and crowded, hot and panting, into the big dining-room. After a suitably impressive wait, came the opening ceremony, which never varied. The lord of the house partnered the housekeeper in the first country dance, and the lady of the house was diffidently led out by the butler. These two pairs would then amble archly down the fairway, the natural dignity of their bearing being tempered by the mild *bonhomie* demanded by the occasion. On the completion of the dance, the family retired to a row of imposing chairs ranged along one end of the room. Here the older members of the party remained, bored but firmly rooted by convention, till eleven or eleven-thirty, when they discreetly withdrew, leaving behind them a very much freer atmosphere.

In this freedom of atmosphere the younger and more adventurous spirits of the house party who had, for some time past, been casting roving and appraising eyes over the rows of smug damsels smiling fixedly at the floor in front of their feet, would often find a suitable opening for their hitherto restrained ardour. A quick swoop down and the damsel who had found most favour would be seized and led simpering to take up her appointed place in the next dance. It cannot be claimed that, as a rule, such partner-

ships gave birth to any sparkling interchange of ideas ; in fact, the common experience was that only in violent action did either party find complete ease. So generally was this recognised that the real experts made no attempt at spoken words, but were content to communicate such thoughts as were in their minds by an occasional muscular contraction of the right arm during the moments of action. Here, at any rate, was a language which was understood and appreciated.

A very noble duke once danced three consecutive dances with a fair partner whom he afterwards discovered to have been one of his own kitchenmaids (recently transferred to the house where he was visiting). He admitted afterwards that conversation between them did not flow a smooth and easy course. It is difficult to see how it could have, unless they had discussed horse-radish sauce or something of the sort.

I am writing now of days when such scenes only came within my range of observation through the rare privilege of being allowed to "sit up". Sometimes the privilege was denied me, but being (as I have every reason to suppose I was) a thoroughly odious child, afflicted with an unchristian and rebellious spirit, I did not always lie tamely down under the sheets and blankets to which wiser heads than mine had consigned me.

Those who are intimately acquainted with the architecture of the sad-faced quadrangle known to the world as Dublin Castle, will possibly remember that, at the end of the top bedroom passage—which, in our day, acted as nursery and schoolroom passage—is a kind of hidden loft or gallery from which a watcher can, without being seen, get a very good bird's-eye view of St. Patrick's Hall below. When my father first went to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant, I was seven years old and was, naturally, restricted to amusements suited to that age. Fancy dress balls were not included among such amusements, but with this verdict my stubborn spirit was not inclined to agree, and, as soon as I had satisfactory evidence that those in charge of me were safely moored alongside the supper-table in the day-nursery next door, I would scuttle along the passage in my nightgown and take up a strategic position behind the parapet of the gallery. This, of course, was only when something exciting was going on in St. Patrick's Hall below. Retribution invariably overtook me in the shape of a hair-brush and a strong female right arm, a combination against which a thin nightgown can put up but a poor resistance but, luckily, the point of contact was well case-hardened by periodical encounters of the same kind in the

past, so that, when I had let out a diplomatic yell or two, I would settle down in bed with the comforting feeling, that though wounded, I was victorious.

Well, my father, on one occasion, gave a very magnificent fancy-dress ball in the Castle. The social functions of Dublin have always been supposed by the ignorant to be but pale echoes of those of bigger and blacker London; but I very much doubt whether, outside the confines of Buckingham Palace, any ball has been given in London, within living memory, of a magnificence equal to that of the "Cavalier" ball at Dublin Castle.

My father went as a tall and athletic Charles I, and the conditions were that everyone invited had to come in the costume of the period. All the official staff and the Viceregal "household" were dressed alike in crimson velvet tunics and loose white satin pants (or whatever the Cavaliers called them) heavily slashed with gold, brown boots with innocent spurs and lace collars, cuffs and fringes to their pants. A sword and sword belt and a feathered hat completed the costume. Wigs were dispensed with, on account of their discomfort, but most of the men enhanced the effect of the moustache on their upper lip by "spirit-gumming" a small pointed beard upon the chin. The ladies, of course,



*St. Patrick's Hall in gala mood*



had more latitude but, even so, were rigidly bound to the Charles I period.

The ball was a colossal success, both socially and from the trade standpoint. Mrs. Manning's dress establishment in Grafton Street made a fortune; every tailor in Dublin was working overtime for a month before. The cost of the ball must have been prodigious, for all the dresses were of equal magnificence; in fact, the ladies vied with one another as to which could appear in the more splendid costume.

It is not to be supposed that I have treasured all the above details in my memory as a result of the clandestine peep-show afforded me by the concealed gallery at the end of St. Patrick's Hall to which I had, as usual, crept along as soon as the coast was clear, with a callous indifference to hair-brushes and the unorthodox uses to which they could be put. No! That would indeed be asking too much of the gentle reader; but the gentle reader may rest assured that the honest writer is not drawing on his imagination for such details, for is it not written in the *Book of the Chronicles of the Viceroys of Ireland* that Mr. Chancellor of Sackville Street took photographs of all the principal personages present and, afterwards, coloured them, and coloured them very beautifully, by some process of which the secret apparently has been lost?



Later on, an album containing all these photographs was presented to my father, as a token of appreciation, and this album is still in the family and the individual photographs which it contains have been discussed in my presence over and over again by those who were present then but who have since passed on to the "land of the leal".

So fades away, in Mid-Victorian mists, one of memory's brightest pictures. I turn over the leaves of that old album and breathe a silent prayer for the souls of all those blythe cavaliers and their sweet, smiling dames. Does anyone still survive who graced that splendid pageant? Heaven and such survivors alone know. And what of the quaint old Castle itself? Does the long reception-room still display the same pale blue and gold furniture and the same long poplin curtains, also in the pale blue, so dear to St. Patrick's heart? Are the dining-room walls still thickly hung with kitcat portraits of all the successive Viceroys who have passed the wassail-bowl down the long table? or has that record of a humiliating bond been patriotically swept away? Does the "Pound" still spread its uninviting expanse below the windows in all its pristine homeliness or has independence made a beauty spot of this one-time grim exercising ground for the Queen's proxy? Conundrums



*Misty Memories*



one and all, to which no answer comes or is likely to come. But it would very much interest me to mount once more the broad, branching staircase, below its decorative scheme of starred sword-blades and bayonets, and have a look.

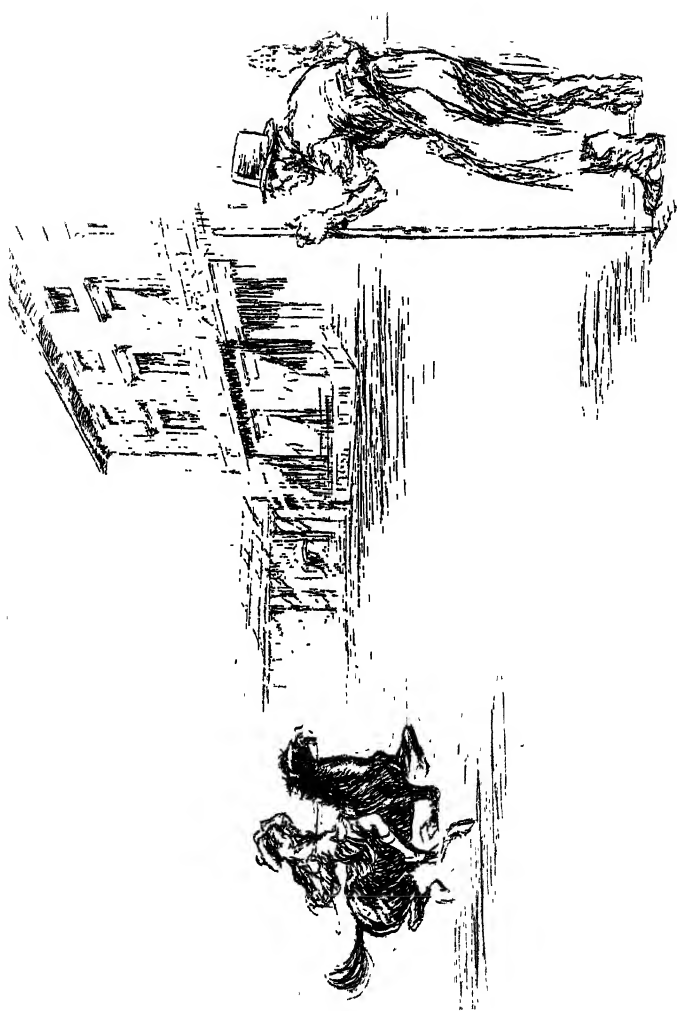
Well, here I am, letting my branching memories lead me across the seas to lands which have now become foreign lands, with different flags and different stamps and different national airs and other things not easy to be understood by humdrum Anglo-Saxons, so let us leave Midvic Dublin (still playing happily and light-heartedly at Royal Courts) and come back to the more familiar Midvic London. To this grimy but convenient centre all self-respecting families moved up in early May, for the serious business of "the Season", into which were compressed all the balls, receptions, Court functions and Operas that broke the placid routine of country-life with their three months' of coruscating riot.

## CHESTERFIELD HOUSE

IN the Midvic days, my father and mother lived at Chesterfield House, at that time a property of some distinction and certainly of formidable proportions. The courtyard, in front, which faces Great Stanhope Street, was twice the size it is now. The columns, half buried in masonry, which now jut out abruptly and rather absurdly from the main block, at that time were detached columns supporting an open-fronted, covered colonnade which swept in a graceful curve from either side of the main block to the two flanking blocks, in which were the laundry on the left and the stables on the right. The laundry block overlooked Curzon Street and the stables stood where No. 2 South Audley Street now stands.

Between the laundry and the garden, and flanking Curzon Street, was a large drying yard, in which the family linen might at any time have been seen by those interested in millinery, sportingly pegged on to ropes in real agricultural abandon. The garden itself was then a vast





*"Knightly exercises of old"*

but unlovely expanse of grass and London forestry, bounded on the South by Curzon Street and on the East by Chesterfield Street. The Garden Club, Chesterfield Gardens, and all the other imposing houses that now rear their four or five floors between South Audley Street and Chesterfield Street had not as yet been thought of.

Our gigantic garden, looked after by one decrepit old man, was seldom explored to its extreme depths either by residents or visitors, but it was certainly the chosen home of all the cats and caterpillars in Mayfair who romped and sang and crawled about the trees in undisputed possession.

The size of the garden, however, at any rate, served one useful purpose for, when the weather was too unsettled to make it prudent for me to take my daily constitutional ride in Rotten Row, I could exercise myself and pony by careering at full tilt round the broad gravel path, that lay under the hither side of the wall that fenced us off from the outside world. It need scarcely be said that the old and decrepit gardener aforesaid did not smile upon these knightly exercises of mine, as his was the sad task of repairing the damage done to the paths but, as the old boy had nothing else to do except to lead the same pony, in greatly chastened mood, up and down



in front of the mowing machine, it was probably morally and physically good for him.

There were no flowers in the London gardens of those days. It never seemed to occur to anyone to put them there. The amateur gardener was, of course, still twenty years distant, so that the hired men did exactly what they liked and what they liked in London was to have no troublesome flowers. So no flowers there were, except the glaring tricolour strip of geraniums, calceolarias and lobelias close under the windows, which were always bedded out by the florist who supplied the plants. The rest was a waste of dusky gravel and unhappy grass. Sometimes we would sit out on the expanse of mown grass at the foot of the steps (still in existence) leading down to the garden but never for long, for comfortable, slumberous, wicker garden-chairs were as yet unknown. Even had they been known, they would have offered no attraction to the ladies of the day who always sat bolt upright with rigid backs. They were taught to.

The halcyon days lived at Chesterfield House were days of a sumptuous splendour that London knows no more. Society, during the three months of the season, was never, so to speak, out of "review order"—uncomfortable, of course, but very grand.



*"Sometimes we would sit in the garden"*



The master of the internal ceremonies, either in town or country, in the days of my early boyhood, was a superb functionary of the name of Burgh, known to us and to the neighbouring tradesmen as the "house-steward". Today he would be called a butler but in those days he was "house-steward". It certainly had a grander sound. Burgh was a great man both in stature and in importance. He always wore the short frock-coat of the day, unbuttoned, and the natural majesty of his appearance was enhanced by a pointed grey "Imperial". The greater part of Burgh's activities—always a little mysterious to my enquiring mind—were carried on underground but, now and again, he would come to the surface, like a large, prosperous rabbit, and be met with in the passages or on the stairs. When this happened, I would say "Good morning, Burgh," rather tremulously, to which the great man would reply, flattening his considerable bulk against the wall "Your most obedient, my lord." The formula never varied and, to boys of eight and ten (self and brother), it never failed to bring a thrill of patrician pride. Misunderstood and unappreciated we might be by our elder brothers and sisters but surely we must be of some intrinsic worth to command such deference from so majestic a being as Burgh.

The house-steward in one of the great houses

of the day was, as already explained, mainly an underground resident but, on State occasions, he would condescend to emerge, officially, from his seclusion and even to appear in the dining-room and pour out some of the very bad wines. However, more of that anon. The liaison officer between him and the family was the groom of the chambers, behind whom was an under-butler and a posse of large, imposing footmen. The under-butler's duties were confined to the care of the plate. The footmen, in London, were plush-breeked, silk-stockinged and powdered. In the country they were allowed to dispense with the powder and to wear trousers with a crimson cord down the seam and waistcoats of the family livery. On the rare occasions of big dinner-parties at Chesterfield House, the dark breeches and stockings that did duty for family gatherings were replaced by uniforms of an almost pantomimic splendour—pink poplin breeches and tunics, with huge silver epaulettes and silver aiguillettes dangling down in front.

The footmen of the day were noble and impressive figures, but it must be owned that their moral worth was not always on a par with the magnificence of their physical deportment. They were always engaged by Burgh, who was more concerned with their physique and more especially with the contour of their



*"Your most obedient, my lord"*



calves than with the whiteness of their souls. As the livery to which a recruit succeeded was very expensive, it was first and foremost essential that newcomers should be of stock size, so as to slip into their legacies without any straining of buttons or loose ungainly flaps. This naturally narrowed down the field of selection. There was no need for the small and virtuous to apply. They were not wanted.

And so the sad truth is that the moral conduct of Joseph, James and Thomas was seldom that which one would have been led to expect from the regularity with which they attended church or from the pious misery of their expressions at family prayers. Beer flowed like water in the lower regions. In some houses (ours, I believe, included) it was on ceaseless tap. Men and women servants could, at any hour of the day or night, recruit their strength by application to a large beer-barrel conveniently placed at some junction in the subways. Beer was in those days, even more than now, the god of the proletariat and, sad to say, Joseph, James and Thomas occasionally got very drunk indeed; but, if their footing was firmly established in the menage by virtue of long service, and their attendance at Church regular, they were generally wept over and forgiven.

The female staff, engaged and fiercely duennaed



by the housekeeper, slept, so to speak, behind iron bolts and bars. In the country they were separated from the men servants by the length of the building—no doubt a very proper and necessary precaution—but in London it was not so easy and, in order to place every obstacle possible in the way of the catastrophies which—in spite of all precautions—occurred with distressing frequency, they had to put up with accommodation which, judged by modern standards, was little short of scandalous. Ostentatious display was still accepted as natural and becoming to the rôle of *grand seigneur*. Another fifty years were to pass before opulent displays began to be condemned as not in the best possible taste. In Midvic days, the good old Georgian custom of impressing your guests by the exhibition of everything you had, was still in full blast. In order to create the desired effect, many and magnificent reception-rooms were almost a necessity, but the inevitable result of this was that very little space was left for the household to sleep in. At Chesterfield House it was always a mystery to me where the servants slept, for the family and the ladies'-maids—a privileged order—apparently occupied every available room up to the attics. My next brother and I shared a small attic between us, bare of any hint of luxury or even of comfort.

This was, possibly, a prudential move on the part of the authorities, for our powers of destruction, I have always been given to understand, were quite remarkable, not so much owing to any double inheritance of original sin as to a rather over-zealous pursuit of pyrotechnic and hydraulic research work, in the course of which it must be owned that the material nearest at hand was occasionally sacrificed to the scientific needs of the moment. The puzzle was that, during the hours of midday activity, the house seemed to swarm with servants. As a matter of fact, I believe the explanation was that the women slept, huddled together like sheep, over the laundry and the men over the stables—the two wing blocks which have since gone the way of almost all old London landmarks, overwhelmed by flanking movements from Curzon Street and South Audley Street.

The stables, as already explained, covered all the ground now occupied by No. 2 South Audley Street and abutted on the Courtyard, which covered all the ground now occupied by No. 1 and most of that on which now stands the Garden Club. Heaven knows how many 16 feet 2 inch black-brown carriage horses were not tucked away in the mysterious recesses of those stables—mysterious because, as boys, we would no more have dared to explore them without an

invitation from Busk, the head-coachman, than we would have dared to explore Buckingham Palace. The invitation never materialised, for I have reason to fear that Busk did not love us two poor little fellows as whole-heartedly as he should have done. He had probably just and sufficient cause. In spite of or, perhaps, because of our exclusion from the sacred precincts, the variegated output of stables never ceased to be to us a source of almost riotous joy.

The most familiar object was my mother's barouche, a noble equipage indeed, dark crimson panelled and hung high up on C springs. The spokes of the wheels were striped in crimson, black and yellow and the heavy silver harness was relieved by huge rosettes of dark blue and white. (How we despised people whose harness was of common brass!) High up on the box sat the great Busk in breeches and silk stockings. How he ever got there goodness only knows, for he was a man of formidable circumference; but, at any rate, there he was and, after a while, an equally splendid footman climbed up to keep him company and off the black-brown horses would prance, stuffed up to the muzzle with corn, but nobly restraining the impulse to stand on their heads and kick their heels up into the great Busk's face.

Busk never drove anyone but my mother.



*Stately days of Auld Lang Syne*



My father had to put up with the 2nd Coachman and the rest of us with subordinates of even more ignominious rank.

The Coachhouse hid a host of carriages of one kind or another, but the two that eclipsed all the others in splendour and, consequently, in the wide-eyed interest of boys, were, of course, the State Coach and the Chariot—pronounced Charyot. On the rare occasions when the Coach lurched out of the stables, the black-brown horses were almost obliterated by the splendour of their trappings. More precariously perched than ever on the high, swaying box, now superbly draped in pink samite, or something of the sort, Busk, radiant in pink and silver and with a three-cornered hat crowning his white wig, stared imperturbably into the distance. Joseph and Thomas, dressed up to match and only moderately drunk, took up their undignified position on the spring-board at the back, the gates were thrown wide and out rumbled the great equipage.

It was the firm belief of my boyhood that nothing equally gorgeous had any existence out of the Arabian Nights. I knew nothing, of course, of all the rival Coaches, blue, yellow, green and brown, with their own special Busks and Thomases to match, that were at the same time ambling down the Mall on their mission of

loyal homage to the Throne. The only other Coach that I was in a position to draw comparisons with was the Duke of Manchester's from No. 1 Great Stanhope Street and that I voted—and probably with justice—a vastly inferior concern.

No. 1, by the way, was an establishment on which Chesterfield House did not smile its sweetest. It was held to be a "worldly" house and tenanted by worldly people. What that meant I never quite understood, nor did I quite understand why we, with our big luncheon-parties and our dressed-up footmen and coaches and all the rest of it, were not worldly too. But, apparently, we were not.

The interpretation of such terms and indeed the entire religious poise of Chesterfield House was, at that time, in the hands of my uncle, Lord Wriothesley Russell, Rector of Chenies, and a cast-iron pillar of the Evangelical School of thought. He was a blameless and benevolent old man, with a soft persuasive manner and a very human weakness for brown sherry; but his religion—in common with that of all his school—was inclined to lean rather more heavily on the Old Testament than on the New. Under his instructions and, I am sure, in the hopes of aiding our youthful path to Heaven, our nursery walls were thickly hung with portraits of the

early Old Testament heroes—David holding Goliath's head, with a large hole in the forehead ; Moses breaking the tablets of stone ; Abraham about to knife his own son ; the infant Samuel and so on. Even Elisha was there, summoning up two bears—one of which, incidentally, was a Polar bear—to devour the unhappy children who had chaffed him about his bald head. Even as a child, with a profound reverence for my uncle Wriothsesley, I found it hard to stir up any love for Elisha. My difficulties would have been even greater had I then realised, as I did later, that, not content with wiping out the unhappy children, he had later on murdered poor old Elijah and then tried to persuade the jury that his master had been carried up to Heaven in a chariot of fire, after bequeathing to him his mantle of office. No, Elisha was certainly not a nice man.



## CONTEMPORARY PIETY

WHEN critical and captious philosophers take up anatomical scalpels and try to dissect religious attitudes such as that of the Midvics, it is always a little difficult to say exactly where the genuine ended and the artificial began. Probably those chiefly concerned would have found an equal difficulty. However, I think it can safely be said that the upper classes did stoutly believe in their own religion, for the very good reason that they had nothing to gain by pretence. Such beliefs as they entertained, however, could lay no claim to be founded either on intelligent study or on contemplation. They were, as a matter of fact, simply an echo of the parson's beliefs and he, good man, naturally told the flock that he led that true religion lay before all else in Sabbath observance and regular attendance at Church. Family prayers might be and, in fact, were a useful auxiliary force, but church attendance was the real thing that counted.

The seed so sown bore rich Victorian fruit.



*False Expectations*



The churches were always full and the parson, from his impregnable position in the pulpit, could—and did—enlarge for as long as he chose on the painful fate that threatened those who stayed away. A hymn of praise, but not always of musical beauty, completed the service and the congregation dispersed to revive their lowered spirits with the roast beef and plum pudding which were no less a statutory part of Sabbath observance, in those days, than the long sermon.

The lower classes, as was only natural, followed the lead given by the Castle or the Hall but, in their case, I am afraid that the *bona fides* of their attitude was not above suspicion. When the lords and ladies of a land are known to place a high market value on professions of piety, those dependent on them for their living are, naturally, quick to scent therein an easy road to favour. It is always easier to sing a psalm than to be good, as David found out many years ago. So the servant class of the day sang psalms and went to Church and to family prayers and illuminated the walls of their rooms with uplifting texts worked in worsted on long strips of canvas and, in the intervals, I greatly fear, did many things that they ought not to have done.

When we lived at Eastwell, we had a keeper of the name of Crab, who enjoyed a high place

in the family esteem on account of the fervour of his religious outlook, which was held to be rare in one of his calling. Even on the field of action his piety continually rose superior to the more sordid details of the chase.

I was a great admirer, in those days, of Alfred Charteris, Lord Wemyss' son, who met his death in the Ashanti expedition, and it was my joy to follow devotedly in his wake when he went shooting. Crab placed him one day at the corner of a covert and Charteris asked him if he thought the birds would come that way.

"Oh yes, Sir," Crab replied, "D.V. they should come well over you".

Evidently, however, D. was not V. that day, for nothing came out at all and I remember reflecting sadly on the bitter sorrow that must be poor Crab's at the failure of Providence to co-operate. I think I even harboured certain semi-mutinous thoughts re this unkind gesture on the part of Providence, for I was, with all the uncritical bias of youth, a staunch ally and adherent of Crab's in rain or sunshine, storm or calm.

Crab was my instructor in the very early use of the gun and never failed, during our expeditions together, to prove a prolific raconteur—with himself generally as hero—and, in many other ways, was an entertaining companion ;



*The pious enthusiasm of Crab*



but, during our moments of sporting intercourse, I was always unhappily conscious of my spiritual inferiority. When for instance he used to say to me : " God willing, my lord, we'll get a good score of rabbits today," I could think of no reply that did not seem, by contrast, miserably profane and inadequate. His pious explanations came out so glibly as to give me the feeling of a lost soul in unworthy association with one of the true elect.

However, one day, during a shooting party, it became deplorably evident that there was a limit that day to God's willingness to help the bag, for only some half-dozen birds came out of a wood in which several hundred were supposed to have been turned down. My father was furious, for he had assembled a distinguished party, and investigations followed which revealed the cold, sad truth that, for years, Crab had systematically been selling both pheasants and eggs.

Crab left within a week and without a character, but doubtless was able to console himself with the reflection that it was the Lord's will. So died my childish faith in the necessary rectitude of piety ; but, notwithstanding the opening of my eyes, my personal allegiance to Crab was not shaken and I mourned his loss for a full twelve months.



The hospitality of Chesterfield House was mainly luncheon hospitality, for which midday meal practically open house was kept. This pleasant practice was by no means confined to our menage. It was the established custom, in all the big London houses of the day, that friends of the family should drop in at luncheon-time uninvited and—in pursuance of this good old custom—five or six extra places were always laid ready for such wayside wanderers, should they feel drawn towards friendly dining-rooms about 1.45 p.m. As a rule they did feel so drawn. Only men came. Ladies did not lunch out in Midvic days.

The spare places at Chesterfield House were filled by a variety of choice spirits. Hugh Greville, Oliver Montagu, Alfred Montgomery, Lord Tankerville, Lord Elcho, Bobby Jocelyn and, of course, any number of others whom I remember less clearly, were always sure of a warm welcome.

There were also, of course, the four well-established and rather formidable brothers-in-law—all with at least one foot in the grave, judged by the chronology of seven impertinent summers. The suitors, destined in the future to carry off my three younger sisters, had not yet loomed over the domestic horizon or, at any rate, if they had, the news of it had not penetrated as

## LONG, LONG LUNCHEONS

far as Chesterfield House schoolroom. When they did eventually join and, in so doing, still farther distend the already much inflated family circle, they proved (by virtue of fewer years) to be far more within the intellectual reach of their little brothers-in-law than the original quartette, who belonged to such remote periods that many of their children actually had the audacity to be older than their uncles. Strange anomalies such as this are all but inevitable in a family in which twenty-four years separate the eldest sister from the youngest brother.

Luncheon, in those days, was always at two o'clock and was a lengthy and substantial meal enlivened by many long-winded and well-rehearsed anecdotes; in fact, it was recognised as a more or less unwritten law that the casual guests should try to pay in part for their entertainment by retailing some new anecdote—if possible in the nature of Society gossip—but always, of course, strictly decorous. Anecdotal conversation was the mainstay of Midvic Society, as it must always be in any Society that neither argues nor explores new channels of thought, but, in such anecdotes, questions of sex were allowed no place; for it was generally understood that Buckingham Palace did not smile on the introduction of such into polite conversation and, in fact, had made the authoritative pro-

nouncement that it "was not amused" by Adam and Eve stories of any kind. Jokes, however, of what may be described as a mild "Sanitary" nature, were, within limits, admissible, for it was rumoured that, at these, the downward corners of the Queen's mouth had been known momentarily to relax. So Society, always closely imitative of the throne, was glad to find relief from its enforced prudery through the same rather turgid channels. Anything to do with sea-sickness (or *mal-de-mer*, as the gentility of the day preferred to call it) was sure to provoke shouts of merriment.

For the rest, when they were not drawing on their stock of anecdotes, they talked mainly about their food and a great deal about their health and the health (or otherwise and, preferably, otherwise) of their friends; for, for reasons which must always be out of reach of this practical Neo-Georgian generation, their grandfathers and grandmothers were never really quite happy unless they themselves and all their friends and relations were ill or, at any rate, "in the doctor's hands"—not always quite the same thing. No one ever argued. To tell the honest truth, the Midvics did not argue particularly well. They were not mentally equipped for it. People who adopt all their opinions ready-made, as the dear Midvics did, are natur-

ally not very good at supporting those opinions logically. All that they know is that they always have held certain opinions and they always mean to, in spite of nasty, cantankerous people trying to make out the contrary. The Midvics, who were not in the least cantankerous, only asked to be left alone with their opinions, right or wrong. They didn't want to argue and they disliked people who did, so much so, in fact, that hostesses fought shy of asking any such to their luncheon-parties or dinner-parties. It was so very unpleasant when they disagreed with the Duchess or—even worse—when they put their meddlesome fingers on some weak spots in the dear Prime Minister's speech.

So, in the happy reunions of the day, there was no argument. It was bad form. Everyone agreed with everything that anyone else said. Platitudes, no matter how threadbare, were always sure of a warm welcome. How wonderful the Prime Minister's speech was! How cold the East wind was! What a wonderful cook the Duchess of Sutherland had! How sad it was that poor Lady Bloomsbury's cold was no better! The doctor said, etc. etc.

In the event, luckily rare, of any contumacious person starting an argument, it was the recognised duty of the hostess or of someone to whom the honour of the house was equally dear, to

“change the subject”. It must be owned that, as a rule, they did it very well, e.g.

HOSTESS.—Won’t you come out into the garden, dear Marchioness? (Oh, yes; we did indeed address Marchionesses by their full four syllables in those days.)

MARCHIONESS.—No, I think not, thank you. My doctor tells me that it is not safe to go into the open air without a hat.

DISAGREEABLE MAN.—But how about the Blue Coat School boys, Marchioness? They always go about without hats.

DAUGHTER OF HOUSE (*hurriedly and rather breathlessly*).—Oh! how I adore those Blue Coat boys! I simply love their yellow legs.

HOSTESS (*in mild reproof*).—Stockings, my dear, you mean.

DAUGHTER (*blushing prettily*).—Yes, of course I mean their stockings.

By this time, thanks to the skilful side-tracking of the daughter, loyally supported by others who scent from afar the menace of an argument, the conversation has been definitely “changed” and the black cloud that momentarily threatened the harmony of the luncheon-party, drifts harmlessly away.

## NIGHTINGALES THAT WERE

IN the harmonious exchanges of thought which lent such an atmosphere of peace to distinguished drawing-rooms in the 'Sixties, the subject of art, as art, was of course never discussed, for art was clearly a controversial subject, as to which our disagreeable man or other disagreeable men might well have held some very subversive views ; and controversial subjects, as we have seen, were never admitted into polite conversation ; but, now that sixty sad years have passed since those days of amiable concord, Mid-Victorian art is a topic which can hardly be passed over in merciful silence. Too many are the rude, unkind things that are said about it and too many, alas ! are the architectural and decorative legacies of the good old days on which the eye of loyalty cannot but rest a little uneasily. " King's Cross Station and the Albert Memorial ! " cries the oldest Mayfair inhabitant. " Damme ! Sir, don't talk to me of King's Cross Station or the Albert Memorial. Look at your Grosvenor House and your Aldford

House and your Gamage's Stores. Look at the new Dorchester House Hotel and try and remember the old Dorchester House which was built in my lifetime—Yes, sir, dammit, in my lifetime—Mid-Victorian from cellar to garret ; and then go away and think."

The oldest inhabitant's point is unanswerable. It is not for an age that sits calmly by and sees such things done to throw mud at the weak spots in Mid-Victorian taste. Of course there were weak spots, but the weak spots were not so much their spots as the spots of those on whom they leaned for guidance. They, poor dears, had not, in fact, bad taste in the common sense ; they simply had no taste at all. They accepted their decorative schemes from the upholsterer and even from the house-carpenter in the same simple, uncritical faith in which they accepted their religion from the parson, their pink mixtures from the doctor, their weather forecasts from the gardener, and their general information from the groom of the chambers. Education on such lines seldom drains the well of knowledge dry. Certainly it did not in the 'Sixties. Most of the common or garden fallacies of today are traceable to copy-book saws of the mid-century.

A system of thinking by proxy and of trust in half-witted subordinates for guidance along the thorny path of life might seem, at first sight, to

point to mental incompetence or, at any rate, to inefficiency. Applied to the Victorians, the last word might be a reasonable fit but most certainly the first would not. The Midvics might be inefficient—in the sense that they had little initiative or self-reliance—but they were not incompetent. Their weakness lay in their dependence on others (chiefly others of the unintelligent orders) for their opinions, and in their complete lack of any critical sense. For this they had, of course, mainly to thank their resolute avoidance of everything and anything in the nature of argument; and, in order to avoid any possible temptation to argue, they remorselessly strangled at birth any critical sense that might be surging up within them for release. They had no wish for any critical sense, for they knew it to stand for the father and mother of argument, and argument, as we have seen, was a child of ill-repute in the days of the good Queen. But, when it came to doing things—not necessarily practical things with a commercial value but the softer and pleasanter things that help so to brighten social life and to strew rose-leaves on the paths of weary pilgrims—they were many streets ahead of this present practical and hard-baked generation. Their needlework was beautiful and they turned out piles of it, generally for charitable purposes. Then they could sing and they could



play and they could draw and paint in water-colours—not amateurishly but really well. Out-of-door games, of course, were not their strong suit; their absurd dress made that impossible, but, taken as contributory assets in a country-house party, they had an incomparably higher value than the cocktail lads and lasses of today. Lord Tankerville, for instance (the grandfather of the present peer)—to jump straight away to one who was a constant visitor—had a tenor voice of very rare beauty, and Lady Tankerville's water-colours were up to high professional standard. Many other Society ladies trod closely on her heels. They brought up their sons and daughters to follow in their footsteps, and follow they did as scrupulously and as successfully as the shivering page of legend followed in the footsteps of Good King Wenceslas.

Dead giants, of course, are always taller than live ones. This is one of the accepted phenomena of comparative measurements; but comparisons really hardly come into this question at all, for, from the field of amateur singing, all giants, even of the secondary grade, have passed away. The breed is extinct. Search where you will, far and near and high and low, from Skegness to St. Kilda, and you will not find such voices as those of the late Lady Henry Grosvenor, Lady Folkestone and Lord Northampton.

Following them as worthy successors came Lady Maud Warrender, Mrs. George Swinton, and Lord Shaftesbury. Not Midvics, of course, any one of them, or anything near it, but pupils of the Midvic school and radiating the Midvic spirit, and very beautiful singers forby. Not only are there none such today but an even sadder thing is that there is no demand for such in these tin-kettle, penny-trumpet days, when the corn-crake ranks higher than the nightingale and when the drawing-room and the kitchen-area pipe the same refrain. All women and girls of education could play the piano then, and play it well. Now no one can strum more than three doubtful chords, and when, under the influence of the third cocktail, any of the bright young things do lift up their voices in song, even a macaw would stop its ears. I once heard Lady Maud Warrender sing "Still wie die nacht" and "Oh, rest in the Lord" in St. Paul's Cathedral. I purposely took up a position near the main entrance that faces Ludgate Hill—in other words, as far from the Chancel, where she was singing, as I could get. The effect was magnificent and impressive beyond words. The glorious voice seemed to fill every chink and cranny of that vast space with infinite ease. Every word, even at the great distance at which I sat, was clear and distinct. It was a performance such as few have ever listened to,

for the setting was unique. Few indeed are the singers who have been privileged to use St. Paul's Cathedral for a vocal recital, and almost as few are those who have been privileged to listen to such a recital. There were not more than ten persons present, but those ten will never forget it. Lady Maud's voice was quite untrained, but it was a superb organ. Alas ! Alas ! *Où sont les voix d'antan ?* The answer does not come readily, but what is quite certain is that—if there were such voices—no one would walk ten yards to hear them, but they will flock in their hundreds to hear Drayson and Manvers, the negro crooners, giving their cheap imitation of singing. Atavism, of course, pure and simple. Atavism is easy. None knew better than the ancient Romans how easy it was to slip down the sheer sides of the Lake of Avernus but how very, very hard to return.

I once knew a young man of amiable and engaging personality. He was the scion of an old and illustrious country stock and the house where he was born is one of the oldest in the Kingdom. He went out to West Africa and settled among the natives, a solitary white man in a community of primitive savages. After a year or two so spent, he himself reverted in part to the primitive type and actually took an active part in the horrible rites which have always

formed one of the hideous features of Darkest Africa. Luckily he was murdered in the end by the natives, in revenge for some flogging atrocity for which he was responsible, so that his family were spared the shame of the exposure which must otherwise have followed. And then we are told that we must move with the times. Yes, Reggie, but not backwards.

From thoughts of Lady Maud Warrender and her wonderful voice, the mind leaps naturally to another Lady Maud, equally gifted in another branch of music. It is not often that the amateur violinist proves a welcome addition to social gatherings—especially if the social gatherings happen to be blessed (or cursed) with sensitive musical ears—but, to this sad but fundamental truth, Lady Maud Lyon must always stand out as a most enchanting exception. Those who have never heard her play can have no idea of the heights to which amateur playing can soar. Even the profession would listen spellbound when she played and, indeed, still listen spellbound when she plays, for, though I may seem to speak of the music of the two Lady Mauds as in the past, that is merely because my own personal opportunities for hearing them belong to the past. Both are still a joy to those whose good fortune it is to be within reach of the magic of their music.

Could we compose music, in the good old days, as well as play it and sing it? Well, I should rather think we could. Where are the songs of today that are fit to be mentioned in the same breath as those of Tosti, Maud Valerie White (yet another musical Maud!) and Lord Henry Somerset? Their songs had words as well as tunes; they appealed to the heart as well as to the ear; they breathed real deep-seated sentiment instead of shallow sexual slosh; they were poems; they were idylls; they soothed the savage breast; they—oh, well, that is all out of date. The songs of today have neither words nor tunes—meaningless jargons set to meaningless noises; but we have to move with the times, so clap, Daphne dear, clap your loudest and try and fool yourself into thinking that the musical movement is forward. But it isn't.

However, let us, before all else, be fair. The golden orioles of one age are the house-sparrows of the next, which is a truth which anyone may interpret as he will—or can. But, in any case, all will agree that every era has its golden streaks as well as its drab, and its drab streaks as well as its golden, and only a microcephaloid in his dotage would claim that the Midvic era was in any way different to all the other eras before and behind it. Let us therefore, in common fairness to Daphne and her friends,

admit that, musical as our grandparents unquestionably were in the drawing-room and even on the concert platform, they did not register the same high standard of musical intelligence in their association with grand opera. By this I mean that it was not their custom—as we know it is with Daphne and her friends—to dig themselves in behind the crimson parapet at Covent Garden and sweep the stage with searchlights for signs of new talent. On the contrary, they one and all went loyally resolved to turn cold and callous ears to the efforts of any but long-established favourites—in fact, the longer the favourites had been established, the more confident was the approval with which the Midvics greeted their efforts, and the greater their proportionate distrust of all new names.

For a generation that always leaned upon others for its opinions, it is difficult to see how any more adventurous course could have been entered upon without disaster. Free thought in opera, like free thought in religion, would inevitably have led to discussion which, in turn, would have led by natural paths to argument, which—as we all know—was an intellectual exercise only to be approached over the dead bodies of good Midvics. So, very wisely, they steered the safe course of heaping praises on the seasoned veterans who had managed to survive from Early Victorian

days and heaping even higher praises on the memories of the great ones that had gone before.

Jenny Lind, who was probably the best soprano within Mid-Victorian ken, was never given quite full marks by the Boxes because of her English-sounding name, which had too strong a flavour of the British home fireside for the Midvics to work themselves up over. Something Italian-sounding was what they wanted, and in nothing with a Nordic ring about it could they find full content; for, wit you well, as Malory would have said, that the lords and ladies of Society were, at that time, in the grip of a frenzied Italo-mania probably without parallel since the fall of the Roman Empire. The mere mention of an Italian name was enough to reduce them to a state of happy hysteria. They found innocent pleasure in calling Leghorn "Laguna" and Naples "Napoli" and in coaxing little Italian words and phrases into their small talk wherever it was possible and, very often, where it was not possible. They did the same, of course, with French, but I think it was generally admitted that an Italian phrase, where neatly slipped into the text, had a higher conversational value than a French one.

So poor Jenny Lind—for all her exquisite singing—was never quite forgiven by the Midvics for not having an Italian name, a transpontine







*"Warbled golden song into my ears"*

prejudice for which I, in turn, find it hard to give them full forgiveness, Jenny Lind having been permanently enshrined in my heart as one of earth's brightest angels ever since one very far-off evening at Cannes, when she sat at my nursery bedside, as I lay in a raging fever, and warbled golden song into my ears. My life had been despaired of, but, before the magic of that supreme voice, all the evil spirits fled and health returned. The memory of that evening of long ago is dim but the impression remains of one of the angelic choir bringing the songs of Heaven into that hot stuffy nursery ; and, what is more, the impression is not far wrong.

Adelina Patti, on the other hand, having every Italian qualification, was pushed up by hundreds of willing hands on to the clouds above Olympus, where she was permanently installed by the side of the semi-mythical Mario. Quite uncritically and in the spirit of little children, the Midvics laid themselves out to worship these two—the one in more or less misty memory ; the other in her own sprightly little person. Not to go to the opera in the 'Sixties, when Patti was singing, was little short of an offence against decency. It had somehow to be excused and explained away, just as presence in London during August had in some way to be excused and explained away. In neither case was any excuse short of *force*

*majeure* or the "act of God" worth putting forward as an explanation. Any plea of a more combatable nature would have missed its mark. The very last thing to be admitted was—what was in most cases the real reason—that no invitation to the second-tier Box or to Lord Tartan's grouse moor in Scotland had been forthcoming.

On a "Patti" night, no one in the Boxes ever thought of listening to anyone but Patti. Whether she sang well or whether she sang badly—which, being no more than common mortal clay, she was quite capable of doing at times—made no manner of difference to the Midvics. A universal hymn of praise went up from every occupant of every Box—not, of course, in the vulgar, blatant way of the stalls, who clapped noisy palms together, but with appropriate little gestures of gloved hands and subdued murmurs of "*brava ! brava !*" When Patti was not "on", they all talked at the top of their voices, making, as a rule, disparaging comments on the efforts of the conscientious and deserving tenor and groaning over the futility of anyone attempting to sing what Mario had once sung.

Primarily, of course, Covent Garden Opera, in the Midvic age, was a dress and jewel parade, but it served also as a convenient altar before which incense could safely be burned to the fashionable idol of the moment. Its third function—and not

the least important—was to fill up the gap between dinners and balls which, in those days, began at midnight and went on till five or six in the grey summer morning. Devastating as these hours must have been to the satiny skins of the Midvic maidens, it must not be forgotten that they only lasted for some ten weeks (the balls, not the skins), and that a statutory period of rest and recuperation followed, either at the seaside or in Scotland, so that, by the middle of September, the young ladies were all in excellent coat again. In this respect they certainly had an advantage over the poor lasses of today, who, go where they will in the moulting season—seaside, moor, river or yacht—are followed at every step by the cries of London and by weak echoes of London's riot. There is no close season now; no respite during which roses may bloom once again on devastated areas, which is rough on the devastated areas and on those who own them, but, when all is said and done, what does it matter so long as there is plenty of potted complexion in the little handbag?

## THE GOOD OLD GAIETY

WHEN those that "have been" turn jaundiced eyes on those that "are" and weep over the death of all sense of beauty and the decadence of all things social and elevating to the spirit, they naturally skim the horizon in search of a first cause. Why is Reggie so different from what his father was? Why are dear little Daphne's ideas all topsy-turvy? We scratch our heads and wonder. So, some time back, may Drusilla have scratched her head over the vagaries of Tiberius, and doubtless did. Why, we can fancy her muttering, this warped perspective? Why these false values? Poor Drusilla probably scratched her head in vain but we, today, with our wider range of vision, are in a happier position, for the answer to our scratching comes pretty readily—and, probably truthfully—in the one word "restaurants". The education of our sprightly young has been a restaurant education, and what we call their warped perspective and their false values are the perspective and the values of the restaurant

world. The war started it all. Girls who came out of the very top drawer, in their eagerness to be kind to those about to die, sank temporarily down almost to the bottom drawer. Cheap dances, cheap restaurants, cheap entertainments—anything in fact to give the poor doomed boys a good time, during their miserable little spell of leave. Restaurants and night-clubs became a habit; dancing became a habit, because it seemed to be the simplest way of amusing the boys; and the habit has remained, though the cheapness has not. Private houses, crippled by post-war taxation, have drawn in their horns and the restaurants have shot theirs out. Private adversity has become restaurant opportunity and the restaurants have been quick to seize it. They have got Reggie and Daphne by the short hairs. All their ideas on music, food, decoration and behaviour are restaurant ideas or—to put it more frankly and less politely—pothouse ideas, for, after all, what is a restaurant but a potthouse with an extra coat of paint?

And so it may, I think, safely be said that, in the eyes of Victorian survivors, quite the most disastrous effect of the war, from the social point of view, has been the descent of all the higher strata of Society (except the very highest) to the level of the stratum immediately below, where they have taken root, at first just nibbling at

what they found, but, in the end, adopting, for the term of their natural lives, the moral weights and measures, the complexions, the thirst, the *hors d'œuvres*, the cocktails and the shibboleth of those among whom they have fallen. The highest stratum of all has alone succeeded in maintaining its pre-war level by the simple process of letting down and keeping down the family portcullis against any and all encroachments from the underworld. This has necessarily had the effect of leaving it high and dry by itself, with a rather disconsolate gap below—a gap which was at one time tenanted by what the Victorians used to call “people one knows” but now barren of occupants, the lordlings and ladylings, who by right belong there, having planed down and settled among the aborigines of the restaurant world, palpable misfits at first but quickly getting acclimatised to the din of the band and the heavy breath of ministering waiters.

Now then, if we skip back fifty years or so to the period to which we are directing our friendly but analytical glance, what a different tale unfolds! It may safely be said that no Midvic lady of the *beau monde* or her daughters or her daughters-in-law ever so much as set foot inside a restaurant. It was not that they swerved off from them in disgust, as a horse swerves off from a dead donkey. Oh, no; there was no silly

prejudice of that sort. It was simply that restaurants had no place in their lists of London realities ; and so it was that, when the C-spring barouches went prancing past the Café Royal or the Continental or the Criterion, not even the horses turned their heads in recognition, and, as to the inmates—well, they simply didn't know what lay beyond those gilded doorways, and—if their placid looks counted for anything—they cared still less. How dull it all sounds ! cry Reggie and Daphne, as one man. Well, of course, that all depends. Dogs see no fun in the Opera nor Englishmen in Bull-fights ; and the Midvics saw no fun in restaurants. They looked upon them (through long-distance glasses of course) as accommodation houses for second-rate people whose home menage was not equal to the task of coping with emergency parties. The Midvics dined in their own houses before going to a play. They dined early, of course, and their guests dined with them (more groans from Reggie and Daphne). Certainly there was no band and there were no actresses or film-stars, but there was at least the environment, physical and functionary, of ladies and gentlemen.

Well, let us suppose that the dull dinner-party in Grosvenor Square has come to an end and off goes the party to their play—very much the same, when they get there, as plays are today,



except that the chorus girls wore silk tights on their legs instead of nothing at all and the men wore wigs.

The wig custom was really an extraordinary one—probably a survival from very early days. In any case, in the earliest theatrical days that I can remember, it was an all but universal practice, if not an absolute rule, for actors to wear wigs on the stage, not so much, I think, with the idea of deceiving people into thinking that it was their own hair—which would not have been easy, for the wigs were always grotesquely unnatural—but rather to make themselves look as different as possible from what they did in real life. Why this should have been considered essential must remain an enigma. I think Charles Wyndham was the first to give this strange custom its death-blow by always appearing on the stage quite undisguised. Now, of course, no actor ever thinks of wearing a wig, unless he is trying to be funny. Otherwise, there is very little change. The footlights, of course, were gas then, and there were no spotlights. Burlesques filled the place now occupied by Revues. Their peculiar feature was that all the dialogue was in doggerel verse. Why, Heaven only knows; but it certainly had this advantage, that certain couplets in the dialogue grew in time to be proverbial and to be sentimentally associated with the particular

actor or (more often) actress who spoke them on the stage.

However, there is nothing more certain than this, that if there were any ladies in the little party dining in Grosvenor Square, their destination would certainly not have been the Gaiety, at that time the recognised home of burlesque, for ladies did not patronise such spectacles, which were held to be frivolous and unedifying.

All old memories of burlesque and burlesquers hang round the old Gaiety. The theatrical circle in London was small then—not one theatre for every six that there are now ; and many of them specialised—Drury Lane for instance in melodrama, the Lyceum in drama of the Irving type and the Gaiety in burlesque, and it was in the latter immortal house—long since pulled down—that all the *jeunesse dorée* of the 'Seventies used to gather in their legions to do homage to the great quartette, Terry, Royce, Nellie Farren and Kate Vaughan. There they sat with their tooth-picks and their crutch-handled sticks and, later, with their nob-headed canes, which they were supposed to suck inanely as they simpered across the footlights at their particular enchantress in the chorus. Well, perhaps they did, or, at any rate, some of them did.

It was a funny custom, that of taking a stick with you into the stalls of a theatre, but, for quite

a considerable period, it was a custom which was as cast-iron as the wearing of sleeve-links in your shirt-cuffs.

The patronage of burlesque being practically limited to one theatre, and that a very small one, we had, of course, to go oftener to that one theatre. In fact we went over and over again. There was one musical show that I saw no less than twenty-two times. "Who was she?" Reggie murmurs languidly, from the depths of his arm-chair. Well, as a matter of fact, there was no "she", but I liked the setting and I liked the music and I liked the principals—across the foot-lights. Besides, it was considered rather chic for young cavalry officers to be regular patrons of particular plays. They became familiar objects to all the stage performers and, after a time, the pink-tighted chorus would acknowledge their presence with friendly nods and smiles. Of course one got to know all the tunes and words by heart. Many of those old tunes had an abiding charm. The earliest I can memorise—words and tune—was, "Never come back no more, boys", sung by the immortal quartette. It was a real good tune, and an even better one—an epoch or so later—was, "Oh, I can't forget the days when I was young". I think that was in the days of that short-lived genius Fred Leslie. Then later again—much later—



*Gaiety Syrens*



## “THE LINKMAN”

that fascinating Spanish travesty, “Come where the gay Gitana grows”, with poor Millie Legarde as the very lovely heroine. There was a charm about those old tunes that does not seem to die.

Some years ago—in fact, a good many years ago—Mr. George Grossmith tried to resuscitate some of the best old tunes by grouping them together in a piece called “The Linkman”, but it did not go. The fact was that the songs had come to be identified, in the minds of those who could remember, with certain personalities round whom we had woven haloes of affectionate romance, and we rather resented hearing the lines sung by someone totally different. It seemed, in a sense, a desecration, almost amounting to an act of piracy. Nellie Farren was Nellie Farren and no one could even begin to imitate her. All the old Gaiety audiences worshipped her. She was not in the least pretty, nor was she particularly young, and her voice was a mere husky croak, but she had a certain natural *bonhomie* about her that was irresistible and quite inimitable. So when someone quite different started singing :

“Getting kicked and howling,  
Bobbies grimly scowling,  
Wretched little Arab forced to stir.  
Please, Sir, hold your nag, Sir,

## THE GOOD OLD GAIETY

Take your little bag, Sir,  
Werry hard to live  
Just what you give.  
Thank you, Sir,"

we felt it to be a profanation and groaned silently in spirit.

Gertie Millar figured in "The Linkman" as Kate Vaughan, but that, too, went flat. The two were so utterly unlike in figure and face that, even if Gertie Millar had understudied Kate Vaughan, her task would have been a hard one. But, of course, she had never even seen the original. So it did not go. If Gertie Millar had been the original in the 'Seventies and Kate Vaughan had tried to imitate her thirty years later, the failure would have been just as complete—at any rate with the old boys who could remember the original; for the apotheosis of an old stage love is not based so much on actual merit as on sentiment. And the longer the distance back the deeper the sentiment.

Ladies, as has already been said, were never seen in the Gaiety stalls. Now and again they would be seen—or half seen—in boxes, hiding half-ashamedly in the background or craning uncomfortable necks round the corner. Even in the more serious theatres, it was not considered the right thing for ladies to be seen in the stalls. The stage had not yet been wholly purged of early

century prejudice. Actors and actresses were still supposed, as a necessitous part of their profession, to lead dark and ill-regulated lives and Society declined to hug any such to its domestic bosom, or even publicly to condone their dark doings by exposing themselves to open view in the stalls.



## THE STAGE AND MEDICINE

TOUCHING the last paragraph of the preceding chapter, I think that few of the survivors of the long past will quarrel with the dogma that the moral attitude of the Midvics towards the mysterious classes whose lives were less sheltered and therefore more adventurous than their own, was, on the whole, one of live and let live. As far as I remember, they were all, rather promiscuously, and without any careful sorting, bundled into the pigeon-hole which bore the label "unfortunates". Some, of course, were more "unfortunate" than others, and, round the dark lives of these, conversation, either at luncheon or at the tea-table—which was just coming into sudden and substantial favour—made wide and prudent detours. Of course there were such people and of course the ways of Providence were sometimes inscrutable, but how much pleasanter it was, after all, to talk of dear Madeleine's engagement to the Duke of Rosshire!

The theatrical profession—such of them, that is, as wore trousers and long skirts—did not, of

course, strictly speaking, come under the heading of parasitical "creatures" more fittingly described, perhaps, by the modern word "vamps" or even of "unfortunates". Society was generous enough to admit that much and to make all proper allowances; that is to say that, though it would have felt guiltily shy if suddenly confronted with actors and actresses in its reception-rooms, it made no attempt, on the other hand, to poke prying noses into the private lives of people who acted—provided they wore trousers and suitably long skirts—in tragedy or serio-comedy. That would have been ill-natured, or, at any rate, might have turned out to be ill-natured, and the Midvics, as I have been at some pains to explain, were never ill-natured—well, let us perhaps rather say were very seldom ill-natured, for, in common fairness to their memory, it must be admitted that there were certain acidulated breaches in this chronic attitude of universal Christian charity. Not with regard to actors and actresses. Actors and actresses, they argued, had of course their own ideas of how best to furnish the domestic hearth, just as Jacob and Solomon had. They were not ideas on which the Midvic peerage could openly smile, but still, after all, they were just actors and actresses who were temperamental and therefore different, of course; and then there were certain Biblical precedents and

so on. So they drew around them the blue cloak of charity and, uplifted in spirit, moved on to their own large and well-stocked nurseries.

All this was vis-à-vis the stage. But now we come to the acidulated relief-spots aforesaid and to the phenomena that were responsible for their outbreak. Generous and wide though the Christian outlook of the Midvics was, there were one or two schools of thought for the members of which they could foresee only the very slenderest hopes of Heaven. High Churchmen, for instance, or Puseyites, as they were then called—caterers to the morbid tastes of the suburbs and of the far west—were sighed over as erring brothers for whom it was sadly feared (or was it, perhaps, piously hoped?) that the distant Pit yawned. Free-thinkers were practically already knee-deep in it, but, far lower even than these in the scale of infamy, were the “quacks”. For the fitting reception of these it was felt that the Pit ought to be deepened by at least several feet. They were reptiles, deliberately poisoning and maiming humanity for their own selfish ends. There was no room for doubt about it. Dr. Gull said so; Dr. Graeme said so; Prescott Hewett said so. That was enough. Even if the Midvics had been able to look fifty years ahead and see the chief of the “quacks” knighted for his services to mankind, it would have made no manner

of difference. What the doctors said ranked higher than what the prophets and apostles said. Bishops and curates, principalities and powers might unite in holding certain views, but, if the doctors held contrary views, the doctors won. Their lightest word was law ; even to scratch a flea-bite in the 'Sixties, without first consulting a doctor, would have been considered rash and foolish in the extreme, *in exemplo* whereof the following simple story, which has the unusual merit of being true.

Lord and Lady Br. were living in the country. Lady Br. developed a cold in the head. She had had many colds in the head before and her invariable practice, on such occasions, was to send for the doctor from the neighbouring town, ten miles distant. In fact, not to have done so would, in her opinion, have stamped her as being both foolhardy and eccentric. So the doctor came and spoke words of comfort, including a promise to return on the following day ; after which he took his departure. Hardly had he gone before Lady Br. gave a little cry of dismay.

" Oh ! George," she cried, " did you remember to ask him about the grapes ? "

" Well, no," Lord Br. admitted, " I stupidly forgot all about it."

" Oh ! George," she moaned, " and you know how fond I am of grapes."

Lord Br. was visibly upset, for he was very fond of his wife, but he was quick to see a remedy for his omission.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said; "I'll send a groom after him. He can ride Polly. She's the fastest we have in the stables and he ought to be able to overtake Dr. Price before he reaches the station." So the order went forth and off galloped the groom, hammering poor Polly most unmercifully along the hard, high road, but to such good purpose that he caught up with the doctor just as he was on the point of disappearing into the station. The note of enquiry was delivered and, after the great man had read it, he bent his brows for a moment or two in deep thought. Finally, on the back of the envelope, he wrote in pencil: "Lady Br. may have six white grapes with each meal, but *on no account* any black grapes."

Next day Polly was reported dead lame.

"I am sorry," Lord Br. said, when he heard the bad news, "for she was a real good mare. Still, it was well worth it, for, unless I had sent her on that errand to the station, it is quite on the cards that we might have given Lady Br. some black grapes."

## CONCERNING DEFERENCE

IN a world of give and take and push and pull, in which the tendency of the common man is, if possible, to take rather more than he gives and to pull rather harder than he pushes, it is not to be supposed that the Midvics—simple as they were—yielded up their superfluous cash to the professional classes without some form of *quid pro quo*. They did not. The *quid* which they expected to get and did get for their monetary *quo* was deference. In the mid-century, the days of graded deference were not yet past. Dukes did humble obeisance before royalty; that, of course. Earls stood humbly aside while Dukes brushed past them and baronets, from their inferior plane, looked up respectfully to Earls. As to the meaner fry—lawyers, parsons, doctors and the like—their heads were seldom covered or their necks unbent, but—as the good book saith—they had their reward.

In such a pleasant atmosphere of reciprocity, it may well be supposed that tradesmen and servants could always find a ready and a profit-

able market for adroit deference. In exchange for "my lords" and "Sir Georges" delivered in sufficient quantities and with becoming reverence, the gilded "swells" of the day were content to let themselves be swindled to any extent. In other words, they bought deference and bought it at rather a high price—bad bargaining, of course, but, after all, is there anything in this at which their grandchildren need blush? No, indeed. Who are we that we should throw bricks at these honest shades because their pockets opened rather readily to the bow and the salute? Would ours, think you, have remained so immaculately closed? Would we have met the bow with a kick and the salute with a straight left? In honest sooth, I think not. Our pride may be of brass but ninety-nine per cent of our feet are of clay. How many bulls'-eyes and marbles would I myself not contentedly have allowed Burgh to abstract from my trouser pocket in return for his sublime gesture of humiliation, when our paths crossed in the by-ways of the big house? All, unquestionably all—even the striped ones. Is it to be supposed that whiskered "grown-ups" were fashioned of sterner and less responsive stuff? Of course not. They too, only too readily, yielded up their bulls'-eyes and their marbles to any and all who effected the exchange with a sufficient

show of deference. A "perfect gentleman" was one who paid everything without asking questions. The term was, of course, invented and used by the robbers, in furtherance of their general scheme of brigandage, but there is no reasonable doubt that the robbed themselves thought that they acquired a certain added distinction by meeting all money calls and charges on them without investigation. To investigate accounts was the degrading practice of business men, or, in the language of the day, "snobs".



## THE DIAGNOSIS OF A SNOB

THE last word of the last chapter will doubtless come as a shock to many, and yet it is idle to try and conceal the rather inglorious truth that, in the good old days, business men were contemptuously labelled snobs. They were, in fact, the only class on whom this nasty name was pinned. The snob of today was there all right—as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be—but he was not called a snob or considered a snob. In the terminology of this present and, no doubt, enlightened year of grace, we say, “Blinkins is a snob”, because Blinkins is well known to have a kindly eye for Dukes and millionaires. He may be quite a pleasant fellow in other ways, but he is a snob. He can’t help it. He expands just as surely when basking in the sunshine of the illustrious as he dries up in the company of the lowly. We may like him personally—and often do—for we all like to be toadied when it is done artistically, but we indulgently recognise him for what he is. He is a snob.

Very different, however, was the reading of the term in the blessed 'Sixties. It would never have occurred to any of the whiskered lords and flounced ladies of that day to speak of Blinkins as a snob. No, indeed. The term would not have seemed to them to fit at all. If they had called him anything, they would probably have called him a "courtier"—not disparagingly but rather the contrary, for, as already remarked, deference had a very high Victorian value. It was looked upon as a proper and becoming attitude on the part of discerning persons towards those whom God—in His infinite wisdom—had placed on superior pinnacles. Those on the pinnacles smiled condescendingly on this reverential attitude and had no hard words for those who kowtowed and salaamed round the base. No; they were, on the contrary, people "with charming manners", "such courtiers", etc. And now, in our 20th-Century brutality, we call them infernal snobs! Well, well!

All this, perhaps, is not very interesting, but the really interesting feature of the social outlook of those days seems to be that the men who were considered "snobs"—and thoroughly despised as such—were the men who worked for their living. Bankers were snobs; brewers were snobs; everyone, in fact, who in the

secrecy of low, commercial retreats busied themselves with figures and accounts.

Never shall I forget the seismic upheaval that ruffled the placid waters of Society when it became known that Harry Bourke, the brother of an Earl, had actually gone on the Stock Exchange. What the Stock Exchange was no one knew very clearly, except that it was some ignoble haunt, far away East, where snobs cheated one another. What was Society to do? Harry Bourke was, personally, very popular. Were they to wipe him off the list of their acquaintances or deliberately shut their eyes to the ignominious pursuit that he had, so very inconsiderately, plunged into? Luckily the problem quickly solved itself. The lead that Harry Bourke had so bravely given, was quickly followed by others who had for long been chafing under the enforced stagnation of brain which the Midvics associated with the word "gentleman". Soon there was quite a rush of well-dressed young men hurrying Eastward in the mornings.

So died unlamented the old idea of the nobility of idleness. Men of fashion began for the first time to try and get some sort of service out of the brains that their long, brilliantined locks concealed. The brains, atrophied by long disuse, did not at first respond very freely, but the grey

matter was there all the time, though stiff from want of exercise, and, after a time, it began to take on a certain mildewed activity, soon to blossom out into real intelligence, comparable even to that of the lately despised but now thoroughly whitewashed snobs. The professional classes viewed the new development with a certain dismay. If gentlemen became stock-brokers, what was to prevent gentlemen from becoming solicitors and even doctors? In which case, good-bye the golden age of simple faith.

Harry Bourke, and those that followed him, knocked the bottom for ever out of the old-time idea of what went to make a snob, for an Earl's son—according to the old reading—obviously could not be a snob; and, in sympathy, the kindred word “cad” took on a new and rather more charitable meaning. A “cad”, during the middle decades of the 19th Century, had been neither more nor less than the superlative of “snob”. Conduct did not enter into the question at all—merely station in life. The bank-clerk was a snob and the bricklayer a cad. In neither case was there any suggestion of moral reproach. God had made them snobs and cads and there was an end of it.

Looking back on these now obsolete interpretations, one cannot but be conscious of a certain feeling of vicarious shame for our forbears.

Why did they pin such ugly labels on citizens of sterling worth? Nowadays no one but a very small schoolboy—and probably not even he—would speak of a bricklayer as a “cad”, or even think of him in such terms. In our modern irreverence, we are far more apt to label peers cads than bricklayers. In the 'Sixties, if anyone had described a peer of the realm as a cad, Society, with one accord, would have stopped its ears and screamed, as at some heinous blasphemy. Swooning was out of date but, morally, everyone present would have swooned. The thing, of course, never happened. To have said, “Lord X is a cad”, would have meant, in the language of the day, “Lord X is the son of a bricklayer or of a farm-hand,” which he obviously was not.

When old terms begin to take on new senses, the whole generic group has obviously got to conform or else go over to some other party; so, when the words “snob” and “cad” were given new meanings, it became clear that the kindred words “vulgar” and “vulgarity” must come up into line, unless they wanted to be left out in the cold. Hitherto both these words had clung rather cruelly round those who lived the partially submerged lives of the bourgeoisie, but now, following the lead given above, they left the poor bourgeoisie alone and attached them-

selves, in contrast, to those whose prosperity was a little too conspicuous. And there they still remain. The change gives birth to thought, and to rather uneasy thought. Is it possible that these nasty words have been conveniently shifted on to the shoulders of those who have soared while we have sunk? And is it still further possible that if these words, in their present application, are a true fit, they would, fifty years ago, have been an equally true fit if applied to—Hush! hush! This will never do. Here we are lightheartedly gavotting into by-paths from which even angels would shy off at right angles.

## CHESTERFIELD HOUSE IN GALA COSTUME

IT was remarked by some philosopher of old that familiarity breeds contempt, which is but a cruder presentation of the old Latin proverb *omne ignotum pro magnifico*, which again means that everything which is out of reach has a fictitious value. Luncheon-parties at Chesterfield House were within daily reach of the two youngest and most interesting—even if the least loved—members of the Hamilton family and, from their very familiarity, had long ceased to thrill; but far otherwise was it with the big semi-state and certainly stately dinner-parties which occasionally brightened the rather melancholy twilight of the interior. As far as I can remember, there were always two of these in every London season, and, during their celebration, Chesterfield House—like a peacock-butterfly emerging from its chrysalis—suddenly blazed forth into an exuberant splendour that never failed to work us up (brother and self) into a fever of excitement in which, I greatly

fear, there was more than a hint of that worldly pride which was supposed to cast such purple shadows over No. 1 Great Stanhope Street and its inmates.

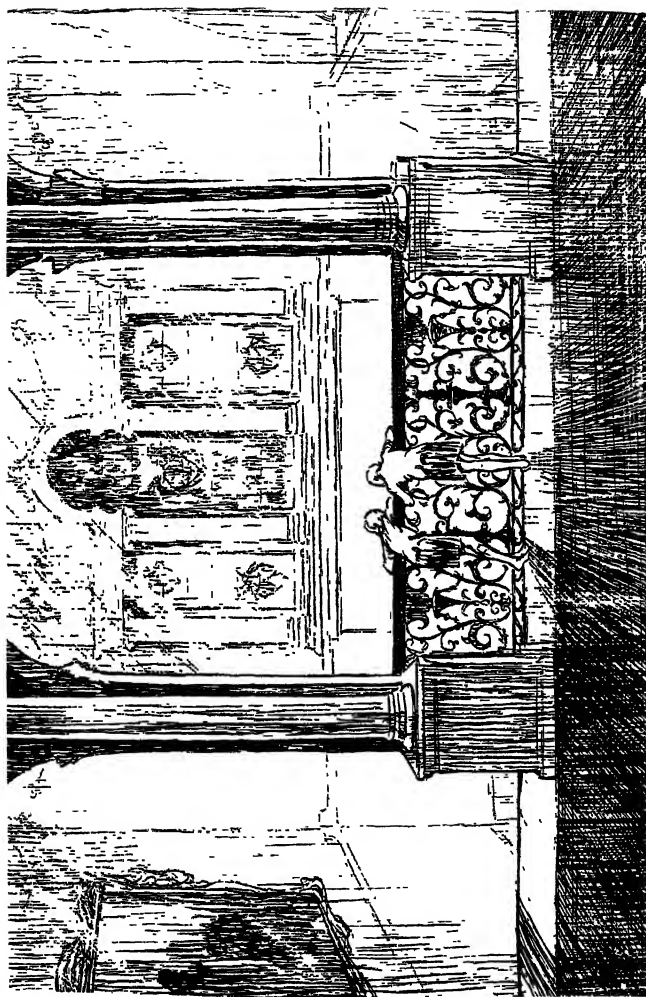
It was our sporting practice, during the opening stages of these festivals, to hide behind the balustrade of the great marble staircase, which, during our tenancy of Chesterfield House, was never used for the purpose for which Lord Chesterfield had no doubt designed it, the entire family coming and going by the back staircase, which had a carpet and was less slippery. From this point of vantage we were able to enfilade the guests as they arrived and to pass muttered and, generally, unfavourable comments on their appearance. Our strategical position behind the balustrade was only achieved after a good deal of skilful manœuvring to avoid the watchful eye of our governess, Miss Omelet, who was of French extraction and pronounced her name "Omely". Needless to say her two small charges did not. Miss Omelet, like all Midvic governesses in old families, was middle-aged and very learned and so superlatively refined that every step along life's rough way must have been acute pain to her. My brother and I despised her heartily because she ate grapes, which she explained she did for the sake of her health. That simply added fuel to our contempt. All



boys dislike grapes, because they are a finicky sort of fruit which people eat in a slow, finicky fashion instead of in gulps, as all real fruit should be eaten ; and, when people frankly admit that they are eaten solely for the sake of health, the cup of their ignominy is filled to overflowing in the minds of boys who can—and do—eat a pint of acorns, or more, without the slightest inconvenience. Of course Miss Omelet really ate them because they were the most expensive fruit on the table, and she thought that, by showing a preference for a hot-house product, she was enhancing her character for refinement, which was her most marketable asset.

In later years, when Miss Omelet had withdrawn from her thankless labours, we used often to visit her in her humble retirement and found her a very sweet and lovable woman, and there is no doubt that the ceaseless friction of our early educational days arose from the colossal mistake that all the Midvics made of putting small boys in the charge of elderly women, with whom they had not a single thought or taste in common, and who always dealt with exuberant youth as though they were dealing with rheumatically old age. Peace to the ashes of the “Homely Omelette”, as her most obnoxious pupils always called her—behind her back.

Ensconced as we were behind the balustrade,



*Spies*



we could see no more than the door of the dining-room opposite, but we knew all about its hidden splendours (the dining-room's, that is), at sight of which we hoped and believed that the astonished guests would presently stagger back in dazed bewilderment, for we had watched the preparations (at the risk of increasing our already considerable unpopularity) from as close as we dared. We had watched with breathless interest tray-loads upon tray-loads of gold and silver treasures being brought to the surface from some sort of Aladdin's cave in the basement and ranged, in suitable formation, on the long dinner-table or in some neighbouring post of vantage.

All these exhumed treasures were more or less familiar objects, dimly remembered across the nine months' gap which, at that age, measures such an infinity ; but their familiarity did not, in the smallest degree, weaken their power to thrill.

The most thrilling of all—judged by our youthful standard and, probably, in reality—were four massive deer-stalking groups modelled by Landseer and executed in frosted silver. These occupied the place of honour down the centre of the table. They were flanked by squadrons of figures in silver armour whose function was purely ornamental but who were supported by a bevy of smaller silver damsels

of the Watteau type, who justified their presence by offering salt to the diners. Overhead, a colossal silver chandelier, which must have weighed fully half a ton, hung magnificently but rather menacingly from the ceiling, while the sideboard glistened under the weight of huge embossed salvers adroitly poised on their edges. All the plates used during the first six courses of the dinner were of solid silver. It was nothing accounted of in the good old days, when Plancus was Consul. As a matter of cold, undecorated fact the glittering pageant, at sight of which, in our youthful imagination, the dazzled guests at Chesterfield House were going to stagger back half blinded was, I believe, a mere wan reflection of similar or rival side-shows provided by some of the other big London houses. A recent memoir-writer assures us that, during dinner parties at Dudley House, the dining-room "was surrounded by sideboards, piled up to the ceiling with gold plate". With this sort of thing we, of course, in our second-rate magnificence, could never hope to compete. We displayed our little all, as the good old custom of the day was, but, when it came to piling half a dozen sideboards up to the ceiling with gold plate, well, there is no use disguising the fact that Dudley House had us well beaten.

Lord Dudley was, at that time, one of the

richest men in England and had the most beautiful wife in England but, in spite of these marked advantages, and in spite of the gold plate which he was able to pile up to the ceiling, he was in a constant state of depression on account of certain startling and, I think one may safely say, unique phenomena of which he thought he detected symptoms in his organism and from which he lived in constant dread of developments which, had his expectations been fulfilled, would indeed have startled not only London Society but the entire scientific world.

Of Dudley House, however, or of Montagu House or of Holland House and of all the hidden glories that they were able to bring into competition, the two small watchers behind the balustrades knew nothing, being firmly and satisfactorily convinced that the family exhibition placed before those whom their parents had delighted to honour, was absolutely "it".

Burgh himself, in any case, was absolutely "it". Dudley House might have more gold plate and Montagu House might have a grander dining-room but could either of them produce a master of the ceremonies of a majesty and stateliness equal to that of Burgh's? No; and a thousand times, No.

In my possibly over-fervid apotheosis of Burgh, in all things except as a selector of wines

(which may, perhaps justly, be counted to his credit), far be it from me to varnish the portrait that I paint too highly. Let me frankly admit that, in certain respects, he was no more than common clay. For instance, on the great occasions of which I speak, the habitual superb serenity of the great man did not always rise superior to the anxieties of the moment. It was hardly to be expected. He was great but he was not superhuman. The entire responsibility for success or failure rested on his well-set, massive shoulders and only too well did he know that, of the imposing platoon of six-foot servitors on whom the diners were dependent—or would presently be dependent—for their meat and drink, he himself was probably the only one who was strictly sober at the beginning and most certainly would be the only one to be strictly sober at the end. Small wonder if certain lines of anxiety furrowed his usually placid brow.

He and the groom of the chambers and my father's valet—usually a sober and virtuous man but, on these occasions, always most inopportunistically drunk and getting into everyone's way, like the clown at the circus—were in the conventional dress of the family butler. Temporarily resplendent in pink and silver, the under-butler and three footmen stood majestically in

the background, their equilibrium, which was certain to be slightly impaired before the close of the evening, being so far irreproachable.

So much for the actual staging of the scene. Behind the scenes, so to speak, but open to our view if not to that of the diners, was a little army of shirt-sleeved underlings hurrying up the innumerable courses from the kitchen and rushing off with piles of dirty silver plates to be washed and polished up for the next course but one. This last, of course, was a stage secret, not disclosed to the public. Altogether it was a really animated scene.

In such functions, the dining-room was, of course, the central stage and that to which the diners naturally attached most importance but the neighbouring reception-rooms—of which Chesterfield House can boast no less than six on the ground floor—were expected to play a fitting part in the pageant and this they achieved, or attempted to achieve, by the temporary discard of the chintzes which, for ordinary family purposes, protected and (mercifully) concealed the monstrous gilt and crimson damask furniture beneath. Sometimes the damask was crimson and sometimes it was yellow but it was always equally hideous. These gaudy and barbaric chairs and sofas, were, presumably, degenerate relics of the “Kent” period and they were,



doubtless, retained in commission as being suitably "handsome" and massive, when all the Chippendale and Sheraton furniture was swept off contemptuously into lumber-rooms as being "gimcracky". To protect their magnificence from dirt and dust they were, for everyday purposes, draped in shiny chintz covers and, by this fortunate and fortuitous precaution, the Victorians (quite inadvertently) achieved their one and only success in the field of artistic decoration. The monstrous oblong mirrors, the plush table covers, the fitted Axminster carpets, the white and gold wallpapers, the heavy gilt valances are all—in this raked-up vision of the past—redeemed and given full absolution when we remember the old shiny chintzes. They were the special hall-marks of the great houses, both in town and country. Pimlico, Bayswater and Bloomsbury knew them not. Their kingdom was in Mayfair and Belgravia and in the historic homes of the counties. In some of the latter they are still to be found but, in London, they have gone the way of all things perishable and gone beyond power of replacement, for the art of making them is dead. Chintzes there are in plenty, which the shops will be glad to sell you, but they are no more like the old ones than a Dutch cheese is like the moon.

The old chintzes were of a chaste and perfect

simplicity. The ground was always white and the design either an arrangement of rosebuds and crinkly blue ribbons on a simple green trellis. There was another rather less formal and more generous hydrangea scheme which was also a universal favourite. Often they were faded with many cleanings. There was never any attempt at uniformity of design. Many different types were found in the same room but they all blended harmoniously, like a bed of azaleas, and they lent to a room a certain aristocratic *cachet* which is beyond the measure of words. All with a long back vision will find a soft place in their memories for the old shiny chintzes.

However, the company at our dinner-party have not yet been called upon to sit bolt upright—as the fashion of the day was—on the gorgeous but very ugly red and yellow damask furniture, for the meal is still in progress in the dining-room. They were stupendous affairs, the dinners of those Midvic days—soup, fish, two consecutive entrees, joint, game, sweet and savoury, followed, quaintly enough, by bread and cheese and mustard and cress—supposed, I believe, to clear the palate for the serious business of after-dinner drinking. The after-dinner drinking of the days we are peering into was, of course, but a pale reflection of the two and three bottle days of the earlier century. It was not serious,

as far as quantity was concerned, but there was still a hint of the religious rite about the actual ceremony. A wine which had hitherto been held in reserve, while meaner stuff did preliminary duty, was produced with a certain butlerian flourish of trumpets and solemnly distributed among the glasses of the males, now all clustered round the host at one end of the table.

To the youth of the Neo-Georgian age it may be of passing interest to learn that, of the eight or ten men now grouped round the head of the table, with foreboding in their hearts, as they mark the stealthy approach of Burgh with the decanter, not one is in a white waistcoat. White waistcoats were never worn by the ancients for dinners or theatres but, in some instances (by no means in all), they were worn for balls and big receptions. My father never wore a white waistcoat in his life. When dressed up for gala occasions, the blue ribbon of the Garter slanted diagonally over a black waistcoat but never over a white. White ties, of course, were worn and tail coats. Dinner jackets, a mushroom product of Manchester and Birmingham, at first despised but, afterwards, universally blessed, had not yet arrived even on the provincial scene, much less in the homes of the illustrious, and the recognised dress of the English gentleman for dinners and theatres,



*"The stealthy approach of Burgh with the decanter"*



great and small, was a tail coat, black waistcoat and white tie.

The so-called "after-dinner" claret of the day—now happily obsolete as such—was, I believe, specially manufactured in France to assist this curious English ceremony, of which no counterpart existed, or ever had existed, in France. It was a sloe-coloured liquid tasting of ink and leaving a heavy deposit of apparent blotting paper at the bottom of the glass; but politeness called for a reasonable consumption of it, with accompanying evidences of satisfaction. It need hardly be said that the claret ceremony was not softened by any smoking which, at that date, was not allowed in the dining-room and which, in any case, would have ranked as a cardinal sin while the loaded but, no doubt, very expensive claret was in circulation.

## THE BATTLE OF THE WINES

FOR a conscientious penman to have to drop ink spots on the fair escutcheon of his family is necessarily an ungrateful task and yet, in common fairness to the thirst of youth for naked unashamed truths, I feel that it would be wrong to withhold the distressing fact that—according to the evidence of those who tasted and yet survived—the wines at Chesterfield House were quite astonishingly bad. Apart from this one blot on their fair fame, it may, I think, reasonably be claimed that the family banquets ranked very high among the entertainments that the season had to offer. My father, with his magnificent presence, fitted in harmoniously with the splendour of the trappings and my mother was, admittedly, one of the most amiable and gracious ladies in the land. Michaeli, the Italian chef (affectionately known to the two youngest members of the family as McKelly), was a genius at cooking. The house was more or less palatial and the *entourage* most imposing. In fact, every prospect pleased and only the wines

were vile. It was years later before I learned the real sad truth. Burgh, it appears, bought all the wines and he certainly dispensed them with a magnificent air, as though they had been the very nectar of the gods. My father, owing to certain gouty tendencies, never drank anything but brandy and Vichy water, and did not even profess to have any taste in wines. So it was all left to Burgh, who no doubt did his best, but it was not a very good best. When my three elder brothers, who fancied themselves as connoisseurs, raised any protest against the quality of the wines, Burgh's invariable defence was to produce a receipted bill from some wine-merchant of high standing, which showed that very high prices had been paid for the various vintages which remained unfinished in the guests' glasses.

The battle of the wines—like the Wars of the Roses—went on interminably, with Burgh an invariable winner on points. When he had faded from the scene, my three eldest brothers, individually and from independent sources, assumed the duties of wine caterers to the establishment. The only result of this disjointed action was that each brother invariably condemned as poison any and all wines which had been recommended by either of the other two.

For over twenty years the harmony of the family circle was, with unfailing regularity,



marred, during the later stages of dinner, by the pained expressions with which two brothers were sniffing at the claret or the port for which the third brother was responsible. There is probably no deadlier wound to a man's self-esteem than to see his vaunted vintages tentatively sipped and then quickly ejected. Of course when guests sit round the table of a common host, no such frank verdict is possible but, when three brothers sit round their father's dinner-table, with their father confined to his room by one thing or another, there is no longer any need for such polite restraint and war is never far distant when one brother sips, with loud appreciative smacks of the lips, a wine which the other two, with expressions of imminent nausea, are spitting out into their finger-bowls. Methinks even Horace himself would have given birth to a caustic Sapphic or two, had he been compelled to sit calmly by and watch Postumus spitting forth his cherished Falernian into the stony cart-ruts of Pompeii. At such moments, even the bonds of family clanship become strained past bearing and the old fratricidal spirit of the Plantagenets takes momentary command.

The gap in years between my three eldest brothers and myself was so wide that I was not even asked to take any part in the battle of the wines ; but my own private opinion was that

EXIT THE LADIES

none of my brothers had any taste whatever in wines and that their judgment was determined solely by the source from which the wines had been obtained.

However, here I am very nearly omitting altogether by far the most exciting incident of the evening, which was the exodus of the ladies from the dining-room. Very gracefully and genteelly had they trailed into dinner on the arms of their appointed partners—not always quite satisfied with the appointment but concealing under light smiles such rancour as they secretly nursed.

“ But London saw another sight  
When they went out at dead of night  
Commanding fists and arms to fight  
The order of their ancestry.”

Lady Eva may have been sent in with Lord Bloomsbury instead of with Lord Bayswater, to whom she considered that her rank entitled her. That slight she had no option but to swallow smiling but she inwardly vowed that she would burst her stays before she let that minx Lady Marion who, consciously or unconsciously, had usurped her rights, to get out of the dining-room before her. No, indeed ! one or the other of them should leave a flounce or two on the floor before that happened. The exact moment for action had, of course, to be nicely timed. There

were probably present two or three ladies of such oustanding eminence that their order of going was firmly established. These stalked out first with the air of smiling superiority which was their right. Then it was that the fun began. Lady Eva, with a straight left elbow, followed by a quick hook of the right, broke through Lady Marion's guard and sent her reeling to the side-board. Then, by superior footwork, she secured so marked an advantage in position that the issue was never really afterwards in doubt. She passed through the door an easy winner and practically unmarked, whereas her plucky little opponent—who was conceding at least 7 lb.—carried a nasty bruise in the region of her fourth rib for several days after.

These amazonian battles are, I believe, no more. Post-warites lay themselves open to the cold censure of the elderly in more directions than one but the consecration of Rank, with the big R, is one of the 19th-Century landmarks that they have mercifully left behind.

## DAPHNE GETS THE MITTEN

THE *Morning Post*, with characteristic lack of comment, made the bald announcement, one autumn morning, that the marriage arranged between Lord Moidart and Miss Daphne Claridge would not take place. As a would-be humorous comment on the announcement, Reggie was sitting at the piano trying with one finger to pick out the tune of "Lochaber no More" and with a certain measure of success for, at the third attempt, the tune was sufficiently recognisable for Daphne to throw a cushion at him and to snap back that she did not care two hoots whether she saw Lochaber no more or not and that, as to Auchenbarrie Castle, it just about registered the world's low-water mark record in dreariness, being a place where people lay in bed all night and sat up all the day and where no one cared two tin tacks what colour your lips or your nails were or what clothes you wore, which proved it to be a spot long ago and deservedly forsaken by *le bon Dieu*.

Whether dear little Daphne was quite sincere

in this onslaught on the ancestral home of the Lairds of Moidart is perhaps open to doubt, for the cold, naked truth is that she had worked very hard to establish herself there as lairdess and what the *Morning Post* had chivalrously omitted to mention was that Lord Moidart, and Lord Moidart alone, was responsible for the rupture, because of the settled conviction in his mind, after reasonable experiment, that Daphne and Auchenbarrie Castle would form about as hopeless a blend as fried herrings and Château Lafitte.

She had made the trial trip full of steadfast resolutions and, for three days after her arrival, she had managed to put in an appearance of breakfast with a smile wreathing her fine red lips but with an acid hatred of the morning air in her mutinous heart. On the fourth morning, however, the good old *Ciro* spirit took complete command and her reluctant encounter with the daylight did not take place till past noon. From that moment, till the last round, the fight was practically over. In the language of the Ring, she had exhausted herself in the opening clinches and, thenceforward, the issue was never in doubt. Day after day the musical clock on the great tower had chimed the midday hour before Daphne tripped down in her latest creation from Reville and with a face that even her dearest friend could

not truthfully have described as her own. As it was generally raining, Daphne decided that, in a level match with the Scotch mist, her face would probably be two or three down before they reached the turn and that it was more prudent therefore on the whole to give the mist a walk-over. Lord Moidart, to whom rain meant no more than a wet kiss from his beloved hills and who was bursting with eagerness to show his fiancée the many beauties of the corries and glens he loved so well, grew more and more restive as the morning hours slipped by and, when in the end, he made the sad discovery, during one of their afternoon excursions, that birches and bracken and heather and brawling burns meant no more to Daphne than the Apocalypse of Daniel, the clan spirit of three centuries of Moidarts surged up within him and placed Daphne precariously at one end of the scales against the house of Auchenbarrie at the other. The scales at Daphne's end tilted up even at the first test and, as day succeeded day, the angle got ominously steeper. Loyally, however, Lord Moidart shut his eyes to the disquieting tilt of the scales till one fateful day when he rowed her out in the dinghy among the silent, tranquil islands of the sea-loch. She carried a case in her hand, which he optimistically took to be a camera of some sort but, when she opened it and, with a

far-away look in her expensive eyes, turned on a jazz gramophone record and scared the indignant sea-birds with the blare of saxophones, he bowed his head over the oars and groaned in spirit, for he knew the end had come. In a silence which was only broken by the raucous lament of some husky bandit that "she didn't say yes and she didn't say no", he rowed her back to the landing-stage and in silence they made their way up to the house.

Next day Daphne, with a fine outward show of sorrow but, actually, with a song in her heart (which was none the less real because it was slightly out of tune), set out for the South and, no sooner had her last cry of "cheerio" faded away in the distance before Lord Moidart sat down and, with much expenditure of thought, composed a courteous letter, in which he expressed his sure conviction that they had been on the eve of making a colossal mistake and that, in his opinion, each would be happier if they trod the paths of life independently. The note followed Daphne to London and it was on the morning after its receipt that Reggie was found making his debut as a pianiste in the manner hereinbefore described.

In the nine days' Society side-chat that followed on the announcement in the *Morning Post*, there were of course two sides, the post-war school

voting unanimously that Daphne had had a lucky escape from being buried alive in wild distant fastnesses, where the sound of the sackbut, psaltery and dulcimer were never heard and where savages walked about in thick shoes with low heels and nails in them.

On the other side, the remnant of the Midvics raised three cracked cheers for Lord Moidart and gave him full marks for having so courageously rid himself of an exotic of the night, whose kingdom might be the pavement or the stage or the dancing floor but was certainly not the Highlands of Scotland.

The first party won by an overwhelming majority, for they are many and the Midvics few. The call of the Highlands, moreover, is dead. Post-warites stare blankly if, by any chance, any Midvic survivor waxes ardent and ecstatic over the magic of Lochaber or Lochiel or the Western Isles. To the Midvics, this cold indifference is rather sad, for, to them, the Highlands were and still are very dear. To them, the birch-clad foothills and the clear rocky burns and the subtle fragrance of unspoilt nature, that fill the lungs as with a magic elixir, are a sheer delight that sets every pulse tingling. As an unregenerate Midvic, I have an honest and unaffected pity for those to whom these things speak in an unknown tongue. They are very heavy losers, for they are shut out



from one of the few joys of life that the passage of years cannot dim. In the hunting field, on the golf course, on the tennis court, the old and grey are left far behind, alone with their regrets and with vain visions of past triumphs and glories in which the rising world makes no pretence of even a passing interest. But in the Land of Lorne, as William Black used to call it, grandfather and grandson play level and, if either is to call for strokes, it will be the grandson, for the mountains and the lochs speak in a tongue which is as yet strange to him, but which, to the old man, is as familiar as the carol of a lark. Not by this would I suggest for a moment that the call or the fascination or the disease or whatever you like to call it advances hand in hand with Father Time. No; far from it. I was, if possible, a more passionate slave of the Highlands at fourteen than I am now. All their enchanted details were so absurdly accessible to the legs of that age. To tireless boyhood, they were then a playground of inexhaustible variety. Now, they are little more than a wistful landscape facing an arm-chair to which the once-familiar details beckon vainly. *O senectus damnabilis.*

## THE CALL OF THE HIGHLANDS

PRIOR to the opening of the 18th Century, there was no appreciation of scenery, as such, in any class of society. Landscapes which remained as the hand of God had fashioned them, made no appeal even to artists. They were "rude" and "savage". Scenic beauty, before the 18th Century, was a matter of Temples, bridges, palladia, columns, terraces, statues, fountains and placid waters—in other words, of artificiality and expenditure of money. A turbulent stream was an eyesore. Gainsborough was the first British artist who was brave enough to paint nature in the raw, and we know how he suffered for his rashness, for, while his portraits were in universal demand, his landscapes reclined three-deep against the walls of his Ipswich studio, unadmired and unwanted. Constable and Morland painted some fine landscapes but they could find no buyers. Whether it was Gainsborough's influence or Constable's, or whether it was the gradual emergence of mankind from the brute state, that was respon-

sible for the 19th-Century passion for scenery, is a nice point, not easily answered ; or was it, perhaps, that the gradual defacement of heaths and commons by the spread of population gave an added value to that which was left ? Possibly. We prize nothing at its true value till we have lost it. In any case, it was not till the early 19th Century that artists began seriously to devote their talents to landscapes. They were, for the most part, south of England landscapes — cornfields, meadows, elm-trees and sleepy streams. Highland scenery would still have been voted too uncouth to please the exotic palates of the Regent and his friends. Even if the Highlands had been accessible, which they were not, the conditions to be found there would have offered no attractions to the sporting gentry of the day, whose costume was not designed for combats with wild nature. My great-grandfather always shot with the ribbon of the garter across his waistcoat. Many others habitually shot from the backs of ponies.

Then, at length the growth of railroads brought Inverness-shire and Argyllshire within reasonable reach of the rich, and the Highland *furor* set in and ran unabated for a good half-century.

The call of the Highlands is said to be in the blood. You either have it or you have not, and, if you have not, so much the worse for you.





*"No shadows on the hill-side that he could not read like  
an open book"*

Possibly I inherited a double dose, for I got it from both sides. My father was an impassioned Highlander—not by ancestry, for to that he had no legitimate claim, but by auto-adoption. He always spoke of himself as “the old Highlander”. He would wrap himself in a shepherd’s plaid and sit on a rock, with his splendid face alight with silent ecstasy, as he drank in the beauties of the scene. There was no change in the skies, no movement of the waters, no shadows on the hill-side that he could not read like an open book. He knew all the distinctive calls of the northern sea-birds—the oyster-catchers, the black-headed terns, the curlew and the sandpipers, and, in his few words—for his words were always few—he would teach me what he knew. He was, of course, not a Highlander. Some people called him an Irishman, but that was not the compartment in which he placed himself. But—even with that claim put aside—the Lowlands claimed him definitely, for, as far back as their history stretches, his family had been Lowland Scot; nor was he in a position to claim any Highland blood from his mother, who was a Lowland Douglas. I think he based his claim, to a certain extent, on the exploits of his early days, when he, Lord Dudley and Lord Bagot and a few other adventurous spirits had pioneered the hitherto unattempted invasion of the High-

lands from the South. That must have been in the early 'Forties. Landseer, a great friend of the family, always accompanied these expeditions as my father's guest, greedily absorbing the atmospheric spirit of the Highlands and perpetuating it in his inimitable paintings of deer-stalking scenes. In one of the most famous of these, "The Return from the Stalk", the central figure crossing the bridge is that of my father in full Highland panoply and with three trophies of the chase carried behind him on ponies. After that, who could refuse him the privilege of being a Highlander? However, as a matter of cold, solid, commonplace fact, Landseer's picture was no more than an artist's fantasy, for my father never wore either kilt or tartan and was always among the first to ridicule those who did so without the proper right.

He himself, by a long stretch back across the centuries, could no doubt have established a legitimate right to the Stuart tartan, being as he was the direct descendant of Mary, eldest daughter of James II of Scotland, who married Lord Hamilton in 1467 and whose great-grandson, Châtelherault, was Regent of Scotland and next in succession to the throne had Mary Queen of Scots died childless; but it was, in any case, a long stretch and he never made it. His only tartan was the Shepherd's plaid.







*"Land of one's dreams"*

We, as boys, wore the Gordon tartan, to which we had surely every right, seeing that it had been invented by our great-grandmother (distressing but irrefutable fact!) when she exalted the Spey-side lads to be Gordon Highlanders instead of mere Northern Fencibles. It was, doubtless, through this same celebrated lady—Janie Gordon, that is—that my mother inherited her intense love of the Highlands, which amounted almost to a mania. So that I, no doubt, got it from both sides. In any case, I have got it, and got it badly.

The nature of the call is indefinable. All that one knows is that the land of one's dreams is a land of bracken and heather and of clear brown streams tumbling over rocks into a tranquil, pale-blue sea spangled with islands. On the yellow, barnacled rocks, against which the tide swishes musically, little clusters of oyster-catchers are perched waiting, no doubt, for the sea-oyster to break cover and give them a run, and, overhead, a golden eagle soars majestically in slow, irregular circles.

Byron sang about the isles of Greece but, had he looked nearer home, he would have found isles in plenty which are every whit as well worth singing about. From Loch Sunart, round Ardnamurchan point to Moidart and thence up into the enchanted creeks and inlets of Loch nan Uagh and, on again past the thousand isles of Arisaig

to Morar, there is no lovelier scenery in the world. These are the Elysian fields in which the merry Midvics sought and found their August and September joys. Hither it was that they journeyed up—very slowly and uncomfortably in those days—to recoup after the fatigues of the London season. They made the journey with happy squeaks of expectation. After some 400 miles they began to sniff the Highland air as a camel sniffs the Nile. Yet another hundred miles and they were there, radiant and content. In their nailed shoes, red tam-o'-shanters and mackintoshes and with their fresh cheeks glistening in the soft rain, they blended with the landscape as the sea blends with the sky or Glenlivet with the mountain spring. The rowan berries smiled upon them ; the grouse crowed them good morning ; the golden eagle overhead circled a little lower, so as to have a better look.

And the Midvic maidens themselves, how they loved it all ! They fished the streams and lochs ; they rowed about among the islets on the sea and fraternised with the friendly seals that poked up enquiring noses to find out what they were doing there, and, on fine days—and, when it is fine in the Highlands, it can be very fine indeed—they sketched the distant hills across the loch or the swirling waters of the great salmon pool, where the two rivers join, and often sketched them very



*Then and now*



well indeed, for sketching was a statutory part of their education.

Well, all this is long ago and we live today in a different world, a world that thinks it knows better. So here we can leave them, past and present, the merry unsophisticated Midvics and the much too much sophisticated Post-Warites, staring at one another across the gap of half a century or more and mutually wondering how such oddities ever came into existence. "Ah!" sigh the grey-heads, "*si jeunesse savait.*" But *jeunesse*, of course, never does; it never has and it never will but all the time it thinks it does, which makes things worse; and, when it comes to pointing derisive fingers at the mote in the Midvics' eye, let *jeunesse* not entirely overlook the beam in its own, or, to use yet another Biblical simile, let it not strain at the moral gnats of other days, when it daily swallows so many immoral camels without the turn of a hair or the flicker of an eyelid.

Let us freely admit that the Midvics had certain affectations which their children's children have shed and very properly shed; but they were at any rate harmless affectations. If it amused them to talk of "tarriers" and of "laloc" and "yellow chaney" and to call radishes "red-dishes" and cucumbers "cowcumbers" and Lord Home Lord "Hume" and North winds

## THE CALL OF THE HIGHLANDS

“ East ” winds (a harmless practice which still survives), why shouldn't they? In spite of it all, they were lovable, which is the main thing. Are the Post-Warites equally lovable? Perhaps they may be, to one another, in spite of blue lashes and tomato lips. How can a mere Midvic tell?







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